

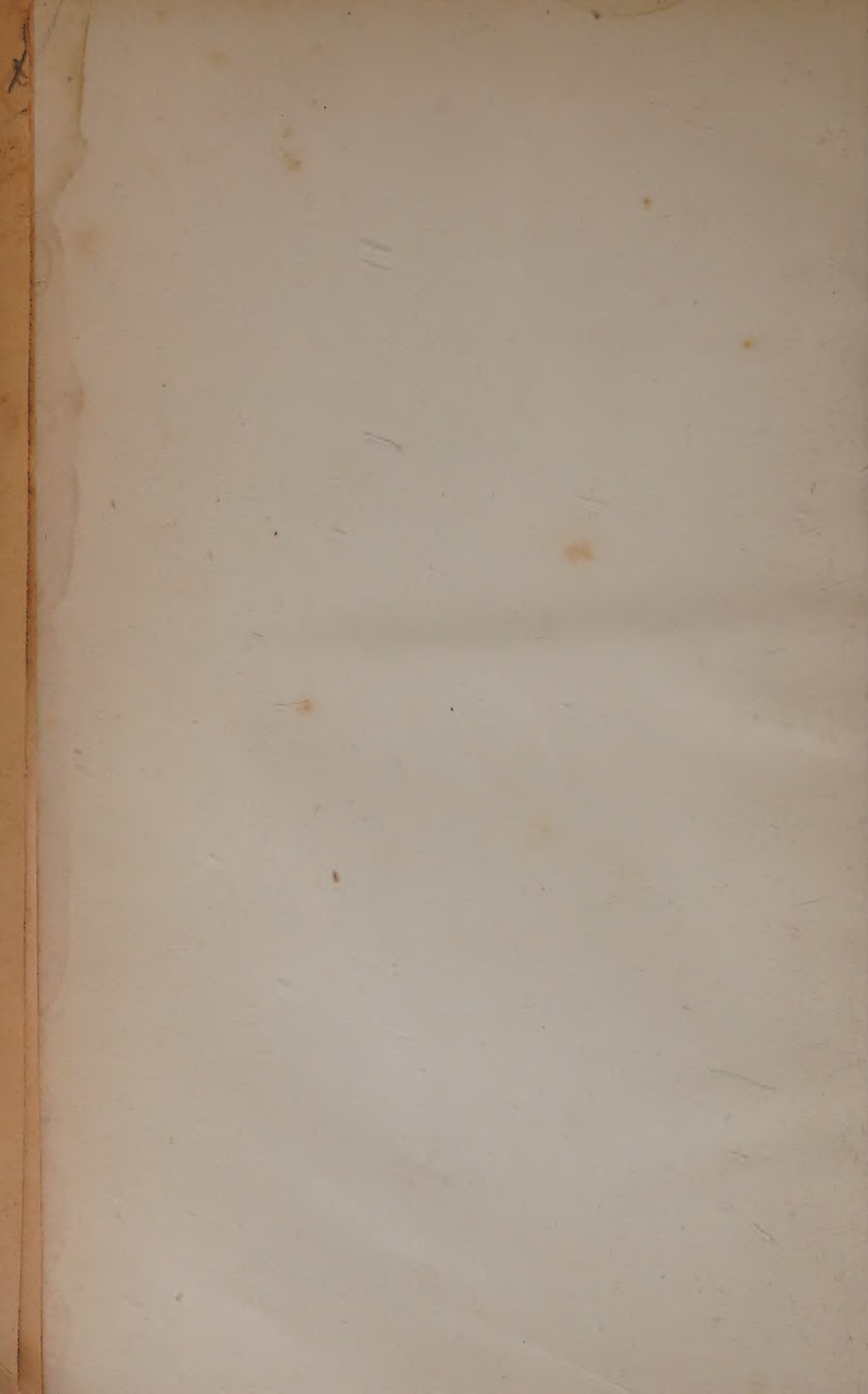
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BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES.

SKETCHES OF FRENCH SOCIETY
IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
FROM UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS.

BY LOUIS DE LOMÉNIE.

TRANSLATED BY

HENRY S. EDWARDS.

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE

1857.

BEAUMARCHAIS

AND HIS TIMES

BY JOHN DE JONVILLE

TRANSLATED BY

CHARLES D. CLARK

BY JOHN DE JONVILLE

NEW YORK

NEW YORK

WILLIAM B. EERDMAN PUBLISHERS

100 NASSAU ST.

1887

TO

M. J. J. AMPÈRE,

OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY,

PROFESSOR OF MODERN FRENCH LITERATURE AT THE
COLLEGE OF FRANCE.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Permit me to dedicate to you this work, which has cost me more labor than any of my others. Owing to the value of the documents which it contains, it will, perhaps, not fall at once into oblivion. If it should be its privilege to live for some short period, it would be very gratifying to me to think that, at the same time, it caused this public testimonial to live, of the profound esteem and the heartfelt and grateful affection which your deputy at the College of France entertains for you.

LOUIS DE LOMÉNIE.

ADVERTISEMENT.

A few pages, containing details regarding the French stage in the last century, criticisms upon the dramatic works of M. de Beaumarchais, and other matters of no interest to the American reading public, have been omitted from this edition of M. de Loménie's work.

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BEAUMARCHAIS AND HIS TIMES.

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ACCOMPANIED by a grandson of Beaumarchais, I one day entered a house in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule. We went up stairs to a garret into which no one had penetrated for several years, and on opening the door—which was not done without difficulty—raised a cloud of dust which almost suffocated us. I ran to the window for air; but, like the door, the window had so completely lost the habit of opening, that it resisted all my efforts: the wood, swollen and rotten from dampness, threatened to fall to pieces beneath my hand, when I took the wise resolution of breaking two of the panes, and we were at length able to breathe and cast our eyes freely around us. The little room was covered with boxes and cases filled with papers. Before me, in this uninhabited and silent cell—beneath this thick layer of dust, I had all that remained of one of the most lively wits—one of the most noisy, agitated, and varied existences which belonged to the last century. I had before me all the papers left fifty-four years ago by the author of the “*Marriage of Figaro*.”

When the superb mansion built by Beaumarchais, on the boulevard which bears his name, was sold and pulled down, his papers were removed to a neighboring house, and shut up in the room where I found them. The presence of a brush and of a few gloves, intended to preserve the hands from dust, showed that from time to time visits had become more rare, death having taken away in succession the widow and daugh-

ter of Beaumarchais. His son-in-law and grandchildren, fearing the documents might fall into negligent or hostile hands, had resolved to let them lie in peace; and thus valuable materials for the history of the eighteenth century—thus all the souvenirs of an extraordinary career had remained buried for more than twenty years in a deserted cell, the aspect of which filled me with a profound melancholy. In disturbing the rest of this heap of papers, yellow with age, written or received in former times in anger or in joy by a being who—as Madame de Stäel said of Mirabeau—was so strongly animated, so fully in possession of life, it seemed as if I was performing an exhumation. I fancied I saw one of those tombs in Père la Chaise which, although visited frequently in the first instance, become at last covered with nettles, reminding us incessantly of the forgetfulness which follows us on the earth, from which we pass so rapidly.

One portion, however, of the papers had been arranged with care: it was that which related to the numerous and varied transactions of Beaumarchais as pleader, merchant, shipowner, contractor for government stores, and administrator.* The

* When Beaumarchais had become rich, and enjoyed the reputation of being a man of universal attainments, he had every plan, every project, in whatever brain it might have originated, addressed to him, in hopes that his co-operation might be obtained. Some notion may be formed of the number from the following list, which only embraces the contents of a single portfolio.

*State of the different Projects submitted to the Consideration of
M. de Beaumarchais.*

Project of a loan for the Duke de Chartres, 1784. Copy of the patent authorizing the Duke de Choiseul to borrow 400,000 francs, 1783. Project of a universal system of criminal legislation. Observations on the means of acquiring land in Scioto. Document for the associated proprietors of the inclosure of the Quinze-Vingts. Notes on the civil existence of Protestants in France. Project of a loan equally beneficial to the king and to the public. Prospectus of a mill to be established at Harfleur. Project of a communication with India by the Isthmus of Suez. Paper on the conversion of peat into coal, and on the advantages of this discovery. Papers containing a plan for giving the king twenty vessels of the line and twelve frigates, to serve as escort for trading vessels to the colonies. Paper on the plantation of rhubarb. Prospectus of a financial operation, and loan in the form of a state

other portion, which presented a biographical, literary, or historical interest, was in comparative disorder; it could be seen that the classification had been left to the cashier Gudin, a zealous man of business, who assigned the first rank to practical matters. Accordingly, after having disinterred from this chaos the manuscripts of the three dramas and the opera of Beaumarchais, we looked in vain for the manuscripts of the "Barber of Seville" and "Marriage of Figaro," until, having caused a locksmith to open a chest, the key of which had been lost, we discovered the two manuscripts at the bottom, beneath a mass of useless papers.* At the side were the works of a watch, executed on a large scale in copper, and bearing the following inscription: "*Caron filius ætatis 21 annorum regulatorem invenit et fecit, 1753.*" It was the invention with which Beaumarchais, the young watchmaker, made his *début* in life. The juxtaposition in the same box of these objects, of such very different kinds, the masterpiece of the watchmaker, and the two masterpieces of the dramatic author, had something remarkable in it; it seemed to be a reminiscence of the Eastern monarch, who placed in the same box his shepherd's garment and his royal cloak. At the bottom of this box were also some portraits of women. One of these—a very small miniature representing a beautiful woman of from twenty to twenty-five years of age—was wrapped up in

lottery. Project of an office of exchange and of a bank of accumulation. Project of a bridge to the arsenal (this last project, now realized, was one which much occupied the old age of Beaumarchais).

* These two manuscripts are copies, but full of corrections, additions, and alterations, which are all in the handwriting of Beaumarchais. They appear to have been used at the first representation of each of the two pieces. The alterations are very numerous, above all in the "Barber of Seville," the two last acts of which, the fourth and the fifth, were cut down into one, between the first and second representations. In the manuscript I find the two acts as they were originally planned by the author. Various other sketches relating to these two above-mentioned pieces—the sketches of "Eugénie," the "Two Friends," the "Guilty Mother," and the "Memorials against Goëzman" (many parts of which have been rewritten, as many as three times, in Beaumarchais' own handwriting), allow us to put an end to the ridiculous question, which has been again raised during our own period, namely, whether Beaumarchais was really the author of his own works.

a piece of paper, bearing the following words in a delicate but rather scratchy handwriting: "*I return you my portrait*"—graceful but fragile relics; less graceful, however, than ourselves, since they survive us! What has become of this beautiful person of ninety years since? (I say ninety years, because I recognized the writing, which dates from 1764.) What has become of this beautiful person, who, by way of sealing a reconciliation no doubt, had written, "I return you my portrait." She has gone, as the poet Villon would say, "where last year's snow has gone!"

Among the numerous documents which this cabinet contained, many appeared to have been put in order by Beaumarchais himself, with the intention of making use of them for the memoirs of his life; and it could be seen at the same time that, after forming this project, he had abandoned it. Thus, in a voluminous portfolio containing his correspondence with M. de Sartines, and the details of his travels as secret agent of Louis XV. and Louis XVI., the following lines in his own handwriting are to be seen: "*Original documents remitted by M. de Sartines—materials for the memoirs of my life;*" lower down, in the same handwriting, are the words, "*useless now.*"

The explanation of this is, that Beaumarchais, in his old age, during the first republic, leaving his daughter with his embarrassed affairs and his lawsuits against the existing government, considered he might injure her, and even injure his own reputation, if he called attention to his monarchical antecedents, and, above all, to that part of his career during which he was in the direct service of Louis XV., Louis XVI., and their ministers.

However this may have been, the examination of those papers makes us regret exceedingly that Beaumarchais did not carry out his project of relating himself the singular phases of an existence which was mixed up with all of the events of his period. Of all the famous men of the eighteenth century, he is probably the one about whom the greatest number of fabulous statements have been circulated, while the real incidents of his life have only been made known to the public by a few vague pages which he has inserted here and there in judicial pleadings, in which the apologetic form and the discussions

which necessarily occur, put the reader on his guard, and satisfy his curiosity in a very incomplete manner.

Every thing which has been written during the last fifty years about the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" has been taken from the same source, that is to say, borrowed from the essay published by La Harpe in 1800, and which forms part of his "Course of Literature."* The chapter devoted in this work to Beaumarchais is sufficiently developed. La Harpe, perceiving with reason that in Beaumarchais the man is superior to the writer, gives a little more scope to the biographical part of the subject than he is in the habit of doing with other authors; but whether, so soon after his death, Beaumarchais' papers had not yet been arranged, or whether La Harpe did not think it right to penetrate too far into an existence which was bound up with those of a multitude of persons who were alive when he was writing, it is certain that he has confined himself to such general information as he might have gathered from the widow of the defunct; and that, in a biographical point of view, his chapter is the merest sketch, in which there is not a date, not a detail, put down with exactness, and in which the principal parts are scarcely indicated, to say nothing of some rather grave errors which have been religiously reproduced by all subsequent biographers. It is not the less incontestable that this chapter of La Harpe's "Course of Literature" has been of much benefit to the reputation of Beaumarchais, which had been so vigorously attacked. Although a severe, and occasionally too harsh a critic of the dramatic author, La Harpe renders to the qualities of the man, with whom he was acquainted, a justice which can not be suspected of partiality; for the celebrated aristarch had at this time become very hostile, not only to the writings, but also to the writers of the eighteenth century; and the unexpected exception which he makes in favor of Beaumarchais, the praises which he lavishes upon his disposition, the warmth with which, before any

* I must except an interesting article published recently by M. Sainte Beuve. The brilliant author of the "Causeries du Lundi," knowing that I had Beaumarchais' papers in my possession, did me the honor to apply to me for information regarding him, and I communicated to him a certain number of details of which he has made excellent use.

one else had done so, he refutes the mass of calumnies which had been heaped upon the head of a man whose life was a continued struggle, have contributed not a little to prevent all conscientious writers who came after him from estimating the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" by the dialectics and sometimes atrocious imputations of his numerous adversaries.

The following is an extract from an unpublished letter of La Harpe addressed to Madame de Beaumarchais six months after the death of her husband, December 1, 1799, just when the critic was engaged upon his essay. This letter proves the spontaneity and sincerity of La Harpe's sympathy, which astonished some persons when the eleventh volume of the "Course of Literature" appeared.

"December 1.

"My own opinion," writes La Harpe, "of the excellent husband whom you regret, had long since made me foresee what is now suggested to you with regard to him by your very natural and praiseworthy affection. I have always been indignant at the calumnies and persecutions, equally odious and absurd, of which he has so often been the object. You may be certain, madam, that on this point thorough justice shall be done; and this is, indeed, one of the reasons which have led me to think of placing a notice of him in the chapter on the 'Comedy of this Century;' but, although this chapter has long been in the hands of the printer, the notice is not yet written. First of all, it will be necessary, according to my method, to read again every thing he has written; and, as I spend so much time in writing, I have not much left for reading. The article must be done very carefully, moreover. I have others to finish previously, and I shall perhaps have the pleasure of seeing you before I commence it: it will be the better for it in every respect.

"You must be equally at rest, madam, as regards every thing which concerns his talent. I have always had a high opinion of it, and I like to render justice. I would doubtless rather have rendered it to him during his lifetime, and I esteemed him sufficiently to have enabled me, while I did so, to add a few words of disinterested criticism; the article would then only have found its place in the rapid glance at contemporary literature which will conclude my work. His literary powers, however, belong to posterity; and, although it is not at present very far removed from him, I shall endeavor to give utterance to its voice as if a considerable distance already existed between them. My opinion will not be open to suspicion. I was more one of his acquaintances than one of his friends, and I never received from him

any of those services which he rendered so willingly to men of letters, and of which I am not ignorant.

"Believe me, &c., DELAHARPE."*

The Essay of La Harpe is important, then, as an honest testimony in favor of the good qualities of Beaumarchais; but as a biography it gives a very insufficient idea of the vicissitudes of his existence, and of the relation which it bore to the history of his time. An estimable writer, the brother of Gudin, the cashier of whom I lately spoke, Gudin de la Brenellerie, who was during thirty years one of the most attached and intimate friends of Beaumarchais, had been struck by the omissions in this Essay of La Harpe's, and had resolved to supply them.† With this view he had prepared a detailed no-

* While in other places we adopt for the name of La Harpe the orthography in most general use, we think we ought to mention that in a great number of his letters which we possess he always signs his name "Delaharpe."

† As Paul Philippe Gudin de la Brenellerie will have to appear more than once in this work, as Beaumarchais' *fidus Achates*, he deserves to be made the subject of a special notice. Sprung from a Genevese family, he was born in Paris in 1738. Like the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," he was the son of a watchmaker. His intimacy with him commenced in 1770, and continued without a cloud until the death of Beaumarchais. Gudin survived his friend thirteen years; he died, correspondent of the "Institute," February 26th, 1812. This writer, who is frequently praised by Voltaire, had more fertility than talent: he published a large number of works in prose and verse, and had several tragedies acted or printed, one of which was burnt at Rome, in 1768, by order of the Inquisition. All those productions are now equally forgotten. Few persons even have any idea that one of the lines most frequently quoted about Henri IV., "*Seul roi de qui le pauvre ait gardé la mémoire*" (the only king whose memory the poor man has preserved), is Gudin's. This line, which is to be found in a piece of poetry sent by him to a meeting of the Academy in 1779, was selected by that body as an appropriate inscription for the statue of Henry IV. (Vide "Grimm's Correspondence," May, 1799.) Write numerous volumes, then, in order that out of all your works one fortunate line alone may remain which every one knows, while no one knows who is its author! In the absence of genius, Gudin had, at least, an excellent heart. It is true that he partook of all the philosophical prejudices of the eighteenth century; he was also tinged with that licentiousness of wit which was then in fashion; but his life was an unpretending one, and much more regular than one would imagine from reading some of his lighter poetry. His intellect had, moreover, been principally directed to serious studies.

tice of his friend's life. This notice forms a manuscript of 419 pages, divided into four parts, and entitled, "The History of Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais; Materials for a literary, commercial, and political History of his Age." It was to be placed at the beginning of the edition of the works of Beaumarchais, published by the same Gudin in 1809;* but, after reading it, the widow of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," a lady of distinction in every respect, and who will be spoken of more at length in the course of this work, ap-

The greatest part of his existence was devoted to the composition of a history of France in thirty-five volumes, on which he founded his greatest hopes of glory, and for which he was unable to find a publisher. Gudin was timid by disposition, and eminently just and honorable. The disinterestedness of his affection and enthusiasm for Beaumarchais has sometimes been suspected, but without reason. I have a number of Gudin's letters, which prove the freedom, openness, and dignity of his relations with his opulent friend. I will only cite one instance, which appears to me very touching. When, after the Reign of Terror, Beaumarchais returned to France, Gudin, who had retired into the country to a distance of fifty leagues from Paris, was burning to embrace the man whom he loved more than any one in the world. But, although he possessed a small patrimony, the severity of the times having deprived him of his ordinary income, he found himself without money to undertake the voyage. Beaumarchais, although impoverished himself, hastened to send him the money necessary. Gudin started, and, after gratifying the wish of his heart, returned to the country. A month afterward I find that he sent Beaumarchais back the money he had borrowed. Beaumarchais hesitated about accepting it, but Gudin insisted with the air of a man who is not accustomed to allow any such advantage to be taken of him. What is to be said, after this, of the ingenious idea of a writer of the present day, who, as I am informed, has discovered that Beaumarchais profited by the poverty of Gudin to make him write those works which are published under the name of the former? Independently of numerous other impossibilities which are involved by such a supposition, it is at once destroyed by reading Gudin, whose prose resembles that of Beaumarchais about as much as an ox resembles a spirited horse.

* This edition, published in seven volumes by Gudin in 1809, has been the model of all the subsequent editions of Beaumarchais. It is far from being complete. Not only has Gudin omitted several literary productions of Beaumarchais, with which he was perhaps unacquainted, but he has even suppressed some very interesting historical documents from political reasons; and, from the same motives, he has only published a very small number—and those not always the most interesting—of the mass of letters which Beaumarchais left.

pears to have objected to the publication of this biography, from motives which I find indicated in a note in her own handwriting. Madame de Beaumarchais remarks with much sense that, instead of contenting himself with relating the life of his friend, Gudin, the old philosopher of the eighteenth century, who has learned nothing and forgotten nothing, mixes with his narrative a host of anti-religious declamations of his own, which have lost all their force in 1809; that he thus renders himself liable, without wishing it, not only to compromise the memory of Beaumarchais, but also to disturb the peace of mind of his family, whom "the critics," adds his widow, "would perhaps wish to make responsible for the opinions of the *philosophical sect, á sect which is so much cried down in the present day.*" Gudin, who was a good man, putting his philosophy out of the question, and who was devoted to Madame de Beaumarchais, sacrificed his work to these considerations. He contented himself with extracting from it a chapter on the drama and comedies of his friend, which he placed at the end of the seventh volume of the edition of 1809, and his "History of Beaumarchais" met with the fate of his "History of France:" it remained in manuscript. This manuscript is not always very exact, above all as regards the first part of the life of Beaumarchais, with which Gudin was not acquainted from his own personal experience, and for which he does not seem to have consulted the materials which I have under my eyes. It contains also many idle dissertations quite away from the subject, with continual and most exaggerated laudations, which somewhat remind us of the bear and the paving-stone. At the same time, several curious facts, hitherto unknown, are to be found in it, which will be useful for the work I have undertaken.

Such are the circumstances which determined me to give an attentive study to the unpublished documents which had been intrusted to me, and to give to the result of this study more space than would be necessary in the case of a simple biography. It appeared to me that this was a favorable occasion for endeavoring to paint Beaumarchais and his times, and that in this instance the history of an individual might throw some light upon the history of an entire epoch; for the

man of whom we are speaking sprung from the lower ranks of society, went in a certain manner through every social position. The astonishing variety of his qualifications brought him into contact with the most different kinds of persons and things, and urged him to play, turn by turn and sometimes simultaneously, the most different parts. Watchmaker, musician, song-writer, dramatist, comic writer, man of fashion, courtier, man of business, financier, manufacturer, publisher, shipowner, contractor, secret agent, negotiator, pamphleteer, orator on certain occasions, a peaceful man by taste and yet always at law, engaging like Figaro in every occupation, Beaumarchais was concerned in most of the events, great or small, which preceded the Revolution.

Almost at the same moment we see him, after being condemned to civic degradation by the Maupeou Parliament, bring about the overthrow of his judges, produce the "*Barber of Seville*," correspond secretly from London with Louis XVI., and, though not yet recovered from the effect of the judicial sentence which still presses upon him, his credit exhausted, his goods seized, we see him obtain from the king himself a million of francs, with which he originates and fosters the intervention of France in the quarrel between England and her American colonies. A short time afterward, still composing songs, comedies, and operas, and always having two or three lawsuits on hand, Beaumarchais trades in the four quarters of the globe; he has forty vessels of his own on the sea; his navy fights side by side with that of the state at the battle of Grenada, his officers are decorated, he discusses the expenses of the war with the king, and treats with the United States, as one power would do with another.

Powerful enough to do all this, powerful enough to get "*Figaro*" produced on the stage in spite of Louis XVI., and to get the first general edition of Voltaire printed in spite of the clergy and the magistracy, Beaumarchais was not even able to insure respect for his own person, and to save himself, in the midst of all his splendor, at the age of fifty-three, from being arrested one fine morning, without rhyme or reason, and shut up for several days in a house of correction like some young scapegrace. Yet at the same time he appeared as the patron

of men of letters, whose interests he advocated with the ministers; was in continual communication, as financier, and even as special agent and councilor, with MM. de Sartines, de Maurepas, de Vergennes, de Necker, and de Calonne; was courted by the nobles, who borrowed money from him and frequently forgot to return it, interceded on behalf even of princes* with the Archbishop of Paris, and was contributing powerfully, but involuntarily, as will be seen, to the destruction of the monarchy.

Persecuted under the Republic as an aristocrat, after having been imprisoned for his opposition under the royalty, the ex-agent of Louis XVI. became all the same, and in spite of himself, the agent and commissary of the Committee of Public Safety. His appointment of commissary, instead of placing him beyond peril, endangered his life, and gave the last blow to his fortune. Originally poor, after having made his fortune and lost it again two or three times, he now saw all his property seized upon, and, after having possessed an income of 150,000 francs, Beaumarchais, in his old age proscribed, concealed under a false name in his garret at Hamburgh, was reduced for a time to such a degree of want that he was obliged, as he says, to economize his matches so as to be able to use each of them twice.†

On his return to his native land, at the age of fifty-five, in ill health, deaf, but still indefatigable, Beaumarchais, while with more than the energy of youth he was mixing himself up with all the affairs of the day, at the same time superintended the production of his last drama, the "Guilty Mother," collected courageously the remains of his fortune, and recom-

* The Prince of Nassau Siegen, a very romantic person, who will be spoken of farther on. He had married a Polish lady who had been divorced, and who applied to the Archbishop of Paris, through the intercession of Beaumarchais, to have her marriage legitimized.

† The following is what I read on some detached leaves written by Beaumarchais at Hamburgh in 1794: "In my distress I have become so economical as to put out a match and keep it, so that I may use it a second time. I only perceived that I did so upon reflection, being driven to it by the wretchedness of my position. This is only worth remarking from the fact that from an income of 150,000 francs I have suddenly fallen into utter want."

menced, with one foot in the grave, all the labors of his life, defended himself against a legion of creditors, prosecuted a legion of debtors, and died, with lawsuits pending both against the French Republic and the Republic of the United States.

This sketch of a most varied life, which I propose to relate in detail, will be sufficient, I think, to cause the many-sided interest which is attached to it to be appreciated. It is not only because it is romantic and full of vicissitudes—it is also, and above all, because it is full of contrasts and incoherence that the life of Beaumarchais is worth being examined carefully as the expression and reflection of an entire period. Is not his life, difform and heterogeneous as it was, the most faithful picture of a social system, which becomes dissolved and decomposed by the continually-increasing discord between ideas and institutions, manners, and laws?

Beaumarchais' personal character has been much cried down; different causes—some of which are connected with circumstances, others with the man himself—have conspired to get him numerous enemies. In this work the object will be, not to poetize his nature, but to show it as it was, and under all aspects. If it will gain in being presented thus in all its truth to those who, judging the man by the statements of his adversaries, had only looked upon him as a daring and clever intriguer, it will lose, perhaps, in the opinion of those who, in order to save themselves the trouble of studying details and shades of character, take men in the mass, and think they have explained the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" when they have said, "He was, in his own way, a great revolutionist." It will be seen in what sense and to what extent Beaumarchais was a revolutionist; it will be seen that he was soon left behind by the Revolution, and that he was often as ardent in his resistance to the excesses of the new *régime* as he had been in his attacks upon the abuses of the old.

If there still remains much to be said about the life and character of Beaumarchais, his talent has already been the subject of numerous criticisms.* It is, however, still possible

* It will be sufficient to quote here, independently of La Harpe's notice, and of the recent notice by M. Sainte Beuve, above alluded to, the very hostile, and often very unjust articles of the celebrated critic

to go rather farther than has yet been done into the literary questions which the mention of his name at once raises, both as regards serious drama and comedy. To the severe criticisms of La Harpe and the still more severe criticisms of Geoffroy, Beaumarchais opposes the best possible argument—that of success; not the success of a day, which proves nothing, but living and durable success, which resists changes in taste and fashion, the caprices of opinion, and those very revolutions which seemed to have produced it, and from which it appeared inseparable. Whatever may be thought of the nature of his talent and of its defects, the author of the “Marriage of Figaro” belongs to the very small number of writers of the eighteenth century who are still acted and still read. There is, accordingly, a reason for studying the types he created, the innovations he introduced on the stage and elsewhere, the very forms of his style—in a word, all the elements of which his literary physiognomy is composed.

CHAPTER I.

Birth of Beaumarchais.—His Family.—The Home of a small Bourgeois in the Eighteenth Century.—Julie Beaumarchais as the Dying Swan.

PIERRE AUGUSTIN CARON, who at twenty-five years of age assumed the name of Beaumarchais, was born on the 24th of January, 1732, in a watchmaker's shop in the Rue de la Féronnerie, and close to that house in the market where it was for a long time thought Molière was born. The error is at present known; but if this St. Denis quarter, which is not looked upon as the centre of brilliancy, and which enjoys in

of the empire, Geoffroy, which are to be found in the collection of his *feuilletons* published under the title of “Course of Dramatic Literature,” the more sensible and elegant articles by M. de Feletz, the pages full of life and brilliancy, which form part of M. Villemain's “Course of French Literature in the Eighteenth Century,” but which only relate to Beaumarchais’ “Memorials against Goëzman;” and, finally, an ingenious and animated sketch by M. Saint-Marc Guardin, published in his “Literary and Moral Essays.”

Paris about the same reputation that Bœotia had in Greece, must resign the honor of having given birth to Molière, it can console itself for it to a certain extent, since it has the right to claim as its natives not only Regnard, our first comic poet after Molière, not only the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," but also M. Scribe, who was also born in the heart of the Rue St. Denis, in a mercer's shop, and of Béranger, who came into the world not far off, at a tailor's in the Rue Montorgueil.

When it is known that Beaumarchais, at the age of twenty-four, was still engaged in the paternal occupation; that he passed, almost without a transition, from his life as a watchmaker to his life at court—to a sort of intimacy with princes and princesses of the blood-royal, and that in this position, with all its novelty, he was able to make sufficient figure to gain some friends and a great many enemies—when this is considered, it appears desirable to inquire what influences he had received from family and education, which up to a certain point might have prepared him for his unexpected part.

His family was humble enough; and it is not without a certain feeling of astonishment that we enter their home, and find their habits, manners, and mental cultivation so far superior to what might have been expected in the household of a small tradesman. The progress of the middle classes during the eighteenth century never struck me more forcibly than when looking over the obscure archives of the family of a small watchmaker in the Rue St. Denis. The reader will be enabled to judge soon whether, in a sphere of life exactly similar, the level of intellectual and social cultivation has not been lowered rather than raised. The inferiority of cultivation in the shop-keeping class of the present day, which is quite reconcilable with the general progress of the masses, might be explained, perhaps above all in Paris, by this consideration, that in the eighteenth century the existence of a highly-refined aristocracy about the court, which associated more and more every day with the trading classes, without, however, mixing itself up with them, kept up a sort of emulation among them in manners and dress, which at the present time has entirely disappeared. I find this idea confirmed by Beaumarchais himself, in an unpublished letter which he wrote to his father

from Madrid in 1768: "The *bourgeoises* of Madrid," he writes, "are the most stupid creatures in the universe; very different from what they are in our country, where refinement in manners and conversation are now found in all classes."

An instance of this universal inclination in the eighteenth century for refinement in manners and conversation is indeed found in his own family. Let us first of all make acquaintance with the father.

André Charles Caron came from the ancient province of Brie. He was born April 26th, 1698, near Meaux, at Lizy-sur-Ourcq, a little village, which has now become a little town, in the department of Seine and Marne. He was the son of Daniel Caron, a watchmaker at Lizy, and of Marie Fortain, both of them Calvinist Protestants. His family was numerous and poor, to judge from the family papers. It is well known that after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, Protestants had no legal existence in France. Independently of the persecutions directed against those who performed any of their religious ceremonies, their marriages and their children were considered illegitimate. One of the Protestant churches which resisted this system of oppression the most strenuously was the reformed church of Brie. It yielded neither to the eloquence of Bossuet nor to the *dragonnades*,* and the Protestants continued to have their unions blessed in *the desert*—that is to say, in a secluded retreat at the back of a wood—by some wandering and fugitive pastor. Thus, without doubt, were the grandfather and grandmother of Beaumarchais married at Lizy, in 1694; and it was perhaps by the hand of one of these fugitive pastors that the names of the children of Daniel Caron and Marie Fortain were written on a little book, which I have now under my eyes, and which is like a book for housekeeping accounts. These humble archives of a Protestant family commence with this pious inscription: "May our help and beginning be in God, who has made all things. Amen. 1695." Then follows the list of fourteen children, several of whom died at a tender age, and of whom André Charles Caron is the fourth.

* See the "History of the Churches of the Desert among the Protestants of France," by Charles Coquerel, vol. ii., p. 513.

Beaumarchais, in a petition to the king, represents himself as nephew, on the father's side, of an uncle who died a captain of grenadiers, with the cross of St. Louis; as cousin, on the same side, of one of the directors of the India Company, and of a king's secretary, which would seem to indicate that his father's family was related to some families in a much higher position than his own. It is certain, however, that his father was born in a poor and humble station. While still very young, André Charles Caron enlisted in the Rochepierre regiment of dragoons, under the name of Caron d'Ailly. After a period of service which must have been rather short, he obtained, for some cause or other, his final discharge on the 5th of February, 1721. He then came to Paris to study the art of watchmaking, and a month after his arrival abjured Calvinism, as appears from a certificate, signed by the Cardinal de Noailles, which I have before me, and which is preceded by a declaration in the following words:

"On the 7th of March, 1721, I pronounced my abjuration of the heresy of Calvin at Paris, in the Church of the new Catholics.

"(Signed),

ANDRE CHARLES CARON."

Beaumarchais, then, was born a Catholic, of a father who, from Protestantism, had returned to the bosom of Catholicism; his recollection of the religion of his ancestors probably added its influence to his natural instinct for opposition, and will, at all events, assist us in explaining the zeal which he will be seen to display about all questions which interest the Protestants.

A year after his abjuration, André Charles Caron addressed a petition to the king in council, in order to be received as a master watchmaker, although he had not yet served the necessary term of apprenticeship. In this petition the petitioner called attention to his abjuration in support of his prayer, which seems to indicate that at this period it was necessary to be a Catholic in order to exercise the profession of watchmaker.* Some doubts might be suggested by

* It appears, indeed, from the Appendix of M. Coquerel's work, that the certificate of Catholicism was at last made necessary for admission into all the corporations of workmen.

this as to the disinterestedness of the father's conversion; but these doubts disappear on reading his private letters, in which he appears to us practicing all the duties of his new religion with zeal, animated with a sincere fervor, and at the same time making use of certain austere forms of speech which he probably retained from his former creed.

Four months after being received a master watchmaker, on the 13th of July, 1722, André Charles Caron married Marie Louise Pichon, whose father is spoken of in the act of marriage as a "citizen of Paris." She was an excellent person, but of rather ordinary intellect, to judge of her by some of our documents. As for Charles Caron, his correspondence exhibits him in the light of a man who is very superior to his position. Indeed watchmaking, from its connection with the exact sciences, is the first of the mechanical arts; but Caron had given himself a scientific education far beyond that usually possessed by a watchmaker; accordingly, in 1746 he was sufficiently celebrated for his knowledge of mechanics to be consulted by the Governor of Madrid on the employment of certain machines for dragging harbors and rivers, and he explains himself upon the subject with all the precision and authority of a highly competent person. In spite, perhaps even on account, of his talents, Beaumarchais' father could never succeed in making his fortune. He met with losses in his business as a watchmaker and jeweler, and finally, during the last years of his life, had only a life pension to subsist upon, which was allowed him by his son.

The literary acquirements of Beaumarchais' father were no less remarkable for his station than his scientific attainments; above all, when it is considered that after leaving a little village to become first a dragoon and afterward a watchmaker, he owed every thing he knew to himself. His style is, in general, good, sometimes elegant, with that tinge of fervent piety of which I was just now speaking, which was curious enough at that epoch, and which is never found in Beaumarchais himself.

Here, for instance, is a letter which he writes to his son, and in which the reader will perceive—probably with some surprise—that the future author of the "Marriage of Figaro"

is compared by his father to Sir Charles Grandison. This letter bears the date of a period when Beaumarchais had as yet no literary reputation; but he had already made his fortune, and was behaving, as he always did, like an excellent son.

"Paris, 18th December, 1764."

"You desire me in your modest manner to love you a little. It is not possible for me to do so, my dear son: a son like yourself is not made to be loved only a little by a father who thinks and feels as I do. The tears of affection which fall from my eyes upon this paper are a proof of it; for the qualities of your excellent heart, the strength and greatness of your mind, fill me with the most tender love. Honor of my gray hairs, my son, my dear son, how have I merited from God the favors he lavishes upon me through you? In my opinion, the greatest favor he can grant to a kind and loving father is a son like yourself. My acute pains left me yesterday, otherwise I should not have been able to write to you. I was five days and four nights without eating or sleeping, and without ceasing to cry out. During the intervals of my suffering I read Grandison, and in how many points did I not find a just and noble resemblance between Grandison and my own son! Father of your sisters, friend and benefactor of your father, if England, I said to myself, has her Grandison, France has her Beaumarchais, with this difference, that the English Grandison is only the fiction of an amiable writer, while the French Beaumarchais really exists for the consolation of my days. If a son honors himself in praising a worthy father, why should I not be permitted to boast of my dear son, while, at the same time, I am only doing him justice?"

"Farewell, my dear child. I wound your modesty; so much the better: you only appear more amiable to the eyes and heart of your affectionate father and friend,

CARON."

The unpublished letters of Beaumarchais to his father are characterized by filial affection, and at the same time by the most profound respect. When he has become a frequenter of the court, and is at the height of his opulence and aristocratic position, he never writes to the old watchmaker without beginning his letters thus: "*Monsieur and dearest father,*" while he always finishes with "*I have the honor to be, monsieur and dearest father, with the most respectful attachment, your very humble and very obedient servant and son.*" Sometimes, however, the respectful correspondent emancipates himself a little, and

goes so far as to address *badinage* to his father; and it is then amusing enough to see the father take it up, and enter the lists with a man so practiced in this kind of contest as his son. We will give one instance of this out of several.

Beaumarchais is at Madrid, occupied with a hundred things at a time—always mixing the grave with the gay, the lively with the severe—running after Clavigo, visiting the ministers, ambassadors, and theatres, studying politics and literature, organizing various industrial enterprises, passing his evenings in drawing-rooms, playing the harp, composing, singing seguedillas, and paying court to the ladies.

At another time Beaumarchais not only occupies himself with getting his sisters married, but also takes it into his head to find a wife for his father, who has become a widower. He wants him to marry a Madame Henry, who was herself the widow of a Consul des Marchands, rather advanced in years, but very amiable, to judge from her correspondence; she possessed some fortune, and had long been intimate with the Caron family.

"I am not astonished," he writes from Madrid to his father, "at your attachment to Madame Henry; she has a most cheerful disposition, and one of the best hearts I know. I wish you had been sufficiently happy to inspire her with a warmer return of your affection. She would make you happy, and you might certainly induce her to make the agreeable experiment of a union founded upon mutual affection and an esteem of twenty-five years. If I were you, I know how I should set about it, and if I were in her place, I also know how I should reply; but I am neither one nor the other, and it is not my business to unravel this knot of yours: I have enough to do with my own."

To this challenge the father replies, in a letter dated the 19th of September, 1764.

"We supped yesterday with my dear amiable friend, who laughed heartily at what you say in your letter about the means you would adopt if you were in my place. Accordingly, she says she should be careful how she trusted you, and that, if she now embraces you with all her heart, it is only because you are at three hundred leagues distance from her."

However, with the assistance of his son, the father succeed-

ed in making the conquest of Madame Henry, who was then sixty years of age, and whom he married on the 15th of January, 1766, being himself seventy-seven years of age. After being married two years he lost his second wife, and some months before his death married again, but this time without the consent and even without the knowledge of his son. The person who became his wife was a cunning old maid, who paid him great attention, and got married to him in hopes of being able to extract money from Beaumarchais. Profiting by the weakness of the old man, she had made him assign to her in the marriage contract a dowry and a share in his property. Now old Caron had no property to leave. What he had received with his second wife had been used for repaying certain advances made by his son, independently of the regular income with which he supplied him. The accounts had been gone over, and Beaumarchais had been made safe; but his father's third wife—speculating on the celebrity of her son-in-law, and on his dislike to a lawsuit of so delicate a nature just after the Goëzman affair had been settled—threatened to dispute the accounts and to make the matter public. For the first time in his life Beaumarchais capitulated to an adversary, and by means of a sum of 6000 francs got rid of the person in question, who appears to have been very cunning, very bold, and rather witty, to judge from her letters. On the portfolio containing the papers relating to this affair, I read, in the handwriting of Beaumarchais, these words: "The infamous conduct of my father's widow forgiven." It is to the influence of this cunning old woman that I must attribute the only period of misunderstanding between the father and the son which I can discover in a correspondence which embraces the fifteen latter years of the father's life. I must add, that this misunderstanding only lasted for an instant, for a letter from the father on his death-bed proves that the good feeling between his son and himself had been completely re-established at the period of his death, which took place at the end of August, 1775.

In order to complete this family picture, we must now introduce Beaumarchais' sisters. He had five, three of whom were born before him. The eldest, Marie Joséphe Caron, who

was married to an architect named Guilbert, established herself at Madrid with her husband and one of her sisters. They there opened a milliner's shop. The husband, who became architect to the King of Spain, went mad and died: his widow returned to France in 1772, without fortune and with two children. Beaumarchais made her an allowance until her death, and after her death continued it to her children, the last of whom died in 1785. Beaumarchais' second sister, Marie Louise Caron, who is called Lisette in the family correspondence, was Clavijo's betrothed, and the heroine of the romantic episode related in the *Memoir against Goëzman*, which Goëthe made the subject of a drama.* The documents left by Beaumarchais do not give us much information about Lisette. It appears that she possessed both wit and beauty. After the rupture with Clavijo, there was some idea of her marrying a friend of her brother's; but the marriage did not take place. She returned, I believe, to France with her elder sister, and retired with her into the convent of the Ladies of the Cross at Roye, in Picardy.†

Beaumarchais' third sister, Madeleine Françoise Caron, was married in 1756 to a celebrated watchmaker named Lépine. From this marriage were born a son, who served as an officer

* I speak of Louise Caron immediately after her elder sister, on account of their having lived together in Spain; but, although I could not find the sister's certificate of birth, I am inclined to think that Louise Caron was the third in point of age, and that she was a little older than Beaumarchais—a fact which would somewhat diminish the poetry of her adventure with Clavijo, and also his infamy, as the heroine of the drama, which was performed in 1764, would at the time have been at least thirty-three years of age.

† I suppose she died in this convent, but I am not sure of it. One of Beaumarchais' grandsons thinks he remembers having heard that she died in America, without, however, being able to give any details on the subject. It has been stated, with reference to a recent drama imitated from "Goëthe's Clavijo," that Lisette at last got married. The documents before me disprove that statement. One thing which appears certain is, that she had ceased to exist in 1775, when Caron the father died; for in the judicial acts occasioned by his decease mention is made of all the members of the family, and Marie Louise Caron is not included among them. It still seems rather strange to me that the sister, whose name Beaumarchais has made most widely known, should be the very one of whom least can be ascertained from his papers.

in the American war, under the name of Des Epiniers, and who died without issue, and a daughter, who was married to another watchmaker, M. Raguet. M. Raguet added his father-in-law's name to his own, and had a son, M. Raguet-Lépine, who, under Louis Philippe's government, was a peer of France, and who recently died.

We can obtain fuller details respecting Beaumarchais' two other sisters. They lived longer with him, and the documents which we possess in connection with them will assist us in depicting the homely but agreeable and cultivated family in the bosom of which the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" was brought up.

The most accomplished of the five daughters of the watchmaker Caron was the fourth, Marie Julie, and she is the one whose mental disposition, in spite of some shades of difference, most resembles that of her brother. Beaumarchais, in a note, represents Julie as only two years younger than himself. I see, from one of her letters, that she must have been born in 1735 or 1736, and consequently that she was three or four years younger than he was. She died a year before him, and was never married. Her whole life was devoted to the interests of her brother, whom she loved dearly, and by whom she was dearly loved. When the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" took the name of Beaumarchais, which he calls, himself, a *nom de guerre*, he gave it to his favorite sister. Accordingly, after her brother's celebrity, it was under the name of Julie Beaumarchais that Julie Caron made herself celebrated in society, where she shone as much by the keenness of her wit as by the amiability of her disposition.

Julie's beauty was not of a regular description; her nose was rather long, and she ridicules it herself very good-humoredly; but she had a pretty figure, a lively face, and charming eyes.

Without being so good a musician as her younger sister, Julie had a great talent for the harp: she even played the violoncello. She understood Italian and Spanish, and composed the verses and music of a number of songs, which she used to improvise on all possible occasions. Her verses are in general more remarkable for their liveliness than for their

poetic value. There are, nevertheless, some compositions of hers in a serious style, which are not without merit. But it is, above all, in her familiar letters that Julie's wit is shown in all its grace and vivacity. She died, at the age of sixty-two, in May, 1798, and after forty days of intense suffering. She died as she had lived—always true to herself, and always original. Of the last we may take as evidence the, to say the least, curious document which I have found among Beaumarchais' papers, and which I here append. The verses are entirely in his handwriting.

"Couplet written and sung by my poor sister Julie a very few hours before her death, to the tune of [here is noted down the air of a quadrille]:

' Je me donnerais pour deux sous
Sans marchander ma personne ;
Je me céderais pour deux sous,
Me céderais même au dessous
Si l'on m'en donnait six blancs,
J'en ferais mes remerciements,
Car je me donne pour deux sous,
Sans marchander,' etc., etc.*

And the old Beaumarchais adds, by way of rider to this remarkable *morceau*, the following *naïve* if not amusing reflection:

"This may well, indeed, be called '*le chant du cygne*,' the swan's dying song; and is the best proof of strength of mind and tranquillity of soul. This 9th May, 1798."

Beaumarchais' sister died, then, almost literally singing; it is but justice to inform those who might be shocked at the species of mirth in the face of death, that Julie was at the time a true and professing Christian; that she attended to all the duties imposed by religion; and that her will, written at this very period, gives evidence of a grave and sincere piety.†

* A literal translation of this eccentric confession of faith has not, for obvious reasons, been given. It may be sufficient to state that the free-spoken, if not free-thinking, lady vigorously denounces any thing resembling mercenary principles in love, and that she appraises her own charms at a price which is more modest than the avowal itself can be said to be.

† She bequeathed to her niece a book she had written herself, and another entitled "The Soul elevated to God." Julie writes: "I beg you

To her friends she leaves what little property she had to dispose of; and after beseeching their prayers on her behalf, she concludes with this touching passage, addressed to Beaumarchais:

"As to thee, my excellent brother, thee, to whom I am indebted for every thing, and to whom I can give back nothing but undying thanks for all the benefits thou hast conferred on me, if it be true, as I believe it to be, that the noblest portion of our being survives the tomb, my soul, grateful and tenderly attached to thee, shall not cease to love thee through all time and through all eternity."

A few details respecting the fifth daughter of the watchmaker Caron will complete the tableau of animated and laughing faces that surrounded the infancy and youth of Beaumarchais. Jeanne Marguerite Caron seems to have received a somewhat brilliant education. She was an excellent musician; played beautifully on the harp; had a charming voice; and, moreover, was exceedingly pretty. She was fond of verse-making, like her sister Julie, and, without having so remarkable an intelligence, was endowed with the same gay and lively wit which distinguished all the family. In her infancy, and even in her adolescence, she was familiarly called "Tonton"—a diminutive of Jeanne and Jeannette. When her brother, metamorphosed into a courtier, had assumed the more graceful name of Beaumarchais, and had allowed his sister Julie to share it with him, he found for "Tonton" a pseudonym which was even more aristocratic—he christened her *Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier*, and it was under this name that she appeared with great success in society.

Mademoiselle Tonton was adored by and tyrannized over a meek martyr of a young man, a lover, who for a lengthened period was allowed to sigh in vain, but who at last, after years of sentimental anguish, succeeded in striking the vulnerable part of this disdainful little heart. This was the son of a king's secretary, Denis Janot by name, who, on purchasing one of those appointments, the holding of which conferred nobility, to keep them for your moments of serious reflection, and may the mercy of God and my ardent prayers afford you many such." In another portion of her will she says to one of her friends to whom she has left a token of remembrance, "My tutelary angel will obtain mercy for me by his prayers and heavenly virtues."

had transformed his somewhat plebeian name into that of Janot de Miron, and subsequently into De Miron alone. Beaumarchais, who had in his turn purchased the place held by the father of De Miron, was very intimate with his son. The latter, a qualified advocate of the Parliament, was afterward nominated accountant to the institution of the Dames de St. Cyr. He was an intimate friend of the Caron family, and fell deeply in love with Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, who, without giving him a positive denial, yet found him so deficient in elegance of manner that she did not feel very anxious to accept him as a husband. Beaumarchais, while making every allowance for his sister's scruples, could not, however, repress his sympathies on behalf of his friend, De Miron.

One day, on learning that Beaumarchais had in contemplation another husband for Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, De Miron took offense, and wrote to him at Madrid, where he then was, a letter couched in the most indignant terms. Beaumarchais, in a moment of irritation, replied in terms of equal indignation. Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier took the part of her brother against her lover. Poor De Miron felt himself on the point of being absolutely discarded, when Beaumarchais—whose anger was never of more than momentary duration—having had time to recall all the amiable qualities of his friend, undertook to intercede for De Miron with Mademoiselle Tonton; and Mademoiselle de Boisgarnier, provided by her brother's care with a suitable dowry, was married to M. de Miron in 1767. Her husband, through Beaumarchais' influence, was at a later period appointed secretary "*des commandments*" to the Prince de Condé.

Mademoiselle de Miron formed the centre figure of a most agreeable social circle. She was always happy to receive artists and literary men. In Gudin's MSS. we learn that the Abbé Delille was in the habit of reading in her salons his unpublished verses. She filled, with no small credit, parts in the "*parades*" or burlesque pieces composed by Beaumarchais, of which one very amusing specimen has come down to us under the title of "*Jean Bête à la Foire*" (Tom Fool at the Fair).*

* This unpublished *parade* by Beaumarchais has little to fear from rivalry with the best *parades* by Collé; it has all the grotesque vivacity

These "*parades*" were performed at the Chateau d'Etiolles, the residence of M. Lenormand d'Etiolles, the husband of Madame de Pompadour. At the chateau there might be seen at the same time, as well as Beaumarchais' sister, the Comtesse de Turpin, Réville, Dugazon and Feuilly of the Comédie Française. Mademoiselle de Miron was snatched from her family while yet in the possession of youth. She died in 1773.*

CHAPTER II.

Beaumarchais' Childhood.—His Education.—Beaumarchais as "Cherubino."—Beaumarchais turned out of doors.—Beaumarchais as a Watchmaker.—His first Lawsuit.

WE have now been enabled to form an acquaintance with the perhaps obscure, but certainly interesting family from which sprang the author of the "Marriage of Figaro." Our readers, we hope, have been led to appreciate the distinctive characteristics of this purely middle-class community—of this tribe of the "*petite bourgeoisie*," refined, cultivated, loving art, literature, courtly manners, courtly wit, seeking the aristocracy, intriguing to come in contact with it, with never-failing upward tendencies, and already prepared, nay, seasoned, for a system of social equality. This system, it must be avowed, notwithstanding the advantages which undoubtedly accrue from it, seems, as far as we have been enabled to judge of it

of this class of entertainments, all the wit and effrontery of equivoque and allusion which characterize them. The prevalent taste existing in the eighteenth century for these *parades* is but a sign of the time. We can scarcely realize to ourselves now the fact of ladies of standing in society, and often of rank and fashion, condescending, in these private theatricals, to utter sentiments couched in the language of the fish-markets. We are more reserved, more decorous in these days; but, unfortunately, it is only in words.

* Mademoiselle de Miron left one only daughter, who much resembled her mother, and who afterward distinguished herself by a passionate love for the arts, for poetry, and, above all, for songs. In the domestic circle she was sportively called the "Muse of Orleans," from her residing at Orleans, where she was married, and endowed with a handsome portion by her uncle Beaumarchais.

from its results, and looking at it from another point of view, to have only produced abasement in the higher classes of society, without elevating in a corresponding degree, as far as regards refinement and intelligence, the class to which the watch-maker Caron belonged. Accordingly, I think I was right in saying that it would be very difficult in our days to find the same social elevation in an equally humble sphere.

The only boy in a family in which there were five girls, the young Caron naturally became the spoiled child of the house; his childhood was not clouded by any of that brooding melancholy which we often find to have characterized the youth of men gifted with comic genius. On the contrary, Beaumarchais' childhood was gay, sportive, roguish, the perfect reflex, in fact, of that wit and talent which were afterward to burst forth with so much lustre. In the preface to the drama of "Cromwell," and by way of proving the necessity of an alliance between tragedy and comedy, M. Victor Hugo insists upon the fact that this contrast is found in the authors themselves. "Democritus," he says, "often appears in the guise of Heraclitus. *Beaumarchais was morose, Molière was sombre, Shakspeare was melancholy.*"* I am sorry to combat the axiom of the illustrious poet: if it be applicable to Molière, and perhaps also to Shakspeare, I deny that it can be in any way applied to Beaumarchais. It is incontestable that occasionally, during his stormy career, in disgrace and in distress, and more especially at an advanced age, there may have been moments in which Beaumarchais' mind was overshadowed with melancholy; but it is equally certain that, of all men who ever held a pen, this man was, it may be said, the last whom the epithet of morose would fit; nay, he is essentially undeserving of it, for he possessed, to a surpassing degree, the art of preserving, under circumstances the most unfortunate and the most discouraging, an extraordinary serenity, and an inexhaustible fund of imperturbable gayety. Every one knows Voltaire's remark on Beaumarchais being obliged to defend himself against the accusation of having poisoned his three wives, when, in fact, he had been but twice married: "This Beaumarchais

* Whence did M. Victor Hugo derive his information as to the "melancholy" disposition of our Shakspeare?—*Translator.*

can not be a poisoner. He is too *drôle* for that." But the remark would have been more strictly true if Voltaire had substituted "gay," "cheerful," for *drôle*. He spoke with more exactness when he said elsewhere, "I persist in thinking that a man so gay can not belong to the family of the Locustes." That which characterizes the author of the "Marriage of Figaro," and which bars forever his being enrolled either in the family of the Locustes or with the comic writers who were "morose," consists not in his "drollery"—that quality can be artificial, and is always more or less forced—but in his frank and natural gayety, which is not always irreproachable, it must be admitted, as regards good taste, but always bears the impress of that thorough raciness which belongs much more to the temperament than to wit. With all due respect to M. Victor Hugo, then, we must maintain that Beaumarchais was born and lived fundamentally gay.

This thorough gayety is fully shown in his correspondence with his most intimate friends, embracing a period of more than fifty years. We shall learn presently, however, that at thirteen years of age he meditated suicide through a disappointment in love; but it is very easy to discover, even from the terms in which his expressions of despair are couched, that his project of suicide at the age of thirteen was no more seriously entertained than the suicide by which it has been pretended that his days were brought to a close. The joyous and sprightly character of Beaumarchais when a child is especially proved by the letters of his sister Julie, who devotes more than one page both in prose and verse to the narration of the boyish frolics of her youthful brother. I can only find space for one single specimen of these several reminiscences, written, by the way, in very bad verse, but which appears to be the earliest composed of all her similar effusions. The composition of this little poem is dated as far back as the time when Beaumarchais was still a watchmaker's apprentice, and he is called in it by his early name of Caron. Julie thus commences—on the somewhat hackneyed model of the *Æneid* and *Henriade*—

"I sing the times of childish innocence,*

And all the pleasures of our happy youth,

*

Je chante ces temps d'innocence,
Et ses plaisirs de notre enfance,

So joyous, and so well divided with
Our dearest friends the Bellanges . . .”

It is evident that the verse is not very rich as regards rhyme, and that the poetical talent of Julie leaves considerable room for improvement; but to this exordium follows a vigorous portrayal of the escapades of young Caron, who it appears “*fait comme un diable*”—plays the very devil—commanding a band of little good-for-nothings, always roving about to plunder the larder, notwithstanding the sturdy resistance of Margot the cook, or at night, on returning from their gambols abroad, to disturb the slumbers of the peaceful inhabitants of the Rue St. Denis. This poem, puerile in itself, merits, however, to be reproduced here, as it is full of details which show us how truly the child was father to the man in Beaumarchais’ case; these details demonstrate how, predestined, as it were, to litigation, and fated at last to glean from successive lawsuits both his fortune and his fame, the young Beaumarchais, as though he had a presentiment of the future, had a remarkable partiality, even in his childish games, for that peculiar species of occupation which was afterward to have so great and serious an influence over his mature age. The future adversary of Goëzman appears to us in this family picture by his sister, not as plaintiff or defendant, but as judge. She describes him sitting on his judgment seat duly equipped in robe and wig, but his frolicsome humor soon gets the better of his judicial gravity; he overwhelms his auditory with an avalanche of fisticuffs and blows with tongs and shovel, and the tribunal at last breaks up in confusion.

We see from this description that the child Beaumarchais loved to enact his own part of “Bridoisson;” only it was a Bridoisson rather more addicted to practical joking than the judge in the “Marriage of Figaro;” his “*fa-a-con de parler*” is much more strongly accentuated. It must not be imagined, however, that the whole of our hero’s youth was spent in larder-sacking and romping. The paternal Caron, to whose religious tendencies we have already adverted, brought up his family in all the practices of religion, and endeavored strong-

Si vifs, et toujours partagés,
Avec nos amis Bellangé.

ly, though without success, to turn the mind of his son toward sentiments of piety.

"My father," writes Beaumarchais in a hitherto unpublished memorandum, "used to conduct us all relentlessly to high mass; and when by chance I happened to arrive after the Epistle was over, I was mulcted of twelve sous out of my four francs, which made up my monthly pocket-money. If my arrival was delayed as late as the termination of the Gospel, twenty-four sous was the fine; and appearance after the Elevation was visited with the forfeiture of the whole four livres; so that it very frequently happened that at the end of the month I found a deficiency of from six to eight livres in my financial budget."

It will naturally be asked what kind of education the young Caron received, where he was instructed, what sort of school-boy life he led.

"I can not understand the reason," writes Gudin, "why Beaumarchais' father did not send him to the university, or place him under the care of the Jesuits: these semi-monks, excellent instructors of youth, by the way, who would soon have perceived the peculiar bent of Beaumarchais' genius, and have trained the youthful branch in the right direction; but by some inexplicable circumstance he was sent to the school of Alfort. Here he certainly acquired more knowledge than there was any idea of imparting to him; but his tutors never suspected his brilliant though latent capacity; he was even for a long period unaware of it himself, and had almost made up his mind to resign himself to the condition of a person having the capacity of loving and appreciating whatever is beautiful either in nature or in art, but nothing more. His father soon recalled him from school; the old man was determined to bring him up to his own calling, and to leave him an establishment ready prepared for him."

Gudin's mention of the Ecole d'Alfort, without giving it any other designation, had at first reminded me of sundry passages in the "Marriage of Figaro," in which allusion is made to the hero having been in old times a veterinary surgeon, and I asked myself the question whether, by chance, the young Caron could have been destined by his father "to make sick animals more wretched" (as Figaro says) before entering on a different career. But, on examination, I find that the veterinary school of Alfort was only founded in 1767, in other words, at an epoch when Beaumarchais was thirty-five years of age; thus the supposition of his ever having studied

the veterinary art falls to the ground of itself. We must therefore conclude, from the information given by Gudin, that there existed circâ 1742, at Alfort, some educational establishment having no connection either with the university or with the Society of Jesus, and where Beaumarchais' father must have placed his son. However, some letters of the latter throw considerable doubts on the truth of this hypothesis; in one he speaks of his walks about Paris on the outdoor holidays, which would seem to indicate that he was in some college in the capital, unless, indeed, he had been previously recalled from Alfort; in another letter to Mirabeau in 1790, and which we shall quote in its proper place, Beaumarchais narrates how, at the age of twelve, when about to receive his first communion, he was taken to the convent of the Minimes, which then existed in the wood of Vincennes, where he took a violent fancy to an old monk, who lectured him at great length, seasoning his sermon, however, with a succulent repast. "I used to hasten there," adds Beaumarchais, "every holiday." This is somewhat at variance with the assertion of Gudin. Nevertheless, it might still be argued that the little scholar used to come from Alfort to Paris on holidays, and that he passed through the wood of Vincennes on his way to the Rue St. Denis. This, however, seems positive, that Beaumarchais' stay at school or college was of very short duration—he left at thirteen years of age. I have found among his papers a curious document, which confirms this fact, and which, in addition, places us in a position to pronounce upon the state of intellectual and moral culture of which, at the age of thirteen, the future dramatist was possessed. Thirteen years of age!—exactly the age of "Cherubino!"

An ingenious, but sometimes adventurous philologist, M. Génin, affirms that the character of "Cherubino" is not an original creation, but is borrowed from one of the prettiest romances of the Middle Ages, "*Le Petit Jehan de Saintré*"—"Little John of Saintré."* He even goes the length of saying that Count Almaviva's page is *but a copy of Le Petit Jehan*. I am not of opinion that Beaumarchais had ever read the

* Des variations du langage Français depuis le XII^{me} siècle, par F. Génin, p. 369.

"Petit Jehan," at least in the crabbed text of Antonio de la Sale, who was very little known in the eighteenth century. If he was acquainted with this novel, he could only have known it through the extract made from it by Tressan, and which was published for the first time in 1780, in the "Library of Romances." It is indeed possible that Tressan's book may have given the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" the idea of representing a page in love with a lady of quality; but, independently of this general analogy, I can see no resemblance between the timid damoisel of the fifteenth century, whose secret the *Dames des belles cousines* has so much trouble in extracting, who has so much need of encouragement although he is "already sixteen and three months," and the pert scapegrace of the eighteenth century, who, when only thirteen, makes love to Susanna, Fanchette, and even to old Marcelline, simply, as he says, "because she is a woman," and who would very readily make love to his godmother herself if she would only throw aside a little of her dignity.* Cherubino, in spite of his Middle-Age costume, is essentially modern, and has unmistakably the stamp of the period in which the character appeared. In order to create this character, which is that of a precocious, witty, and tolerably impertinent boy, Beaumarchais had no need to go back to the fifteenth century; it was sufficient for him to consult his own recollections, and to represent himself at the age of thirteen, for he was quite the original of the page in the "Marriage of Figaro," at least as far as concerns his moral nature.

The first production which came from the pen of the real Cherubino is a letter in a mixture of prose and verse, written by Beaumarchais at the age of thirteen, to his two sisters in Spain. This production is doubly interesting, from the fact of its bearing the comments of the author at sixty-six years of age. A general observation by Beaumarchais, the old man,

* Although, in consequence of the extreme complaisance of the *Dame des belles cousines*, little Jehan becomes more guilty than Cherubino, he begins by being far more innocent. I look in vain for the similarity which Monsieur Génin declares to exist between the story of La Sale and the "Marriage of Figaro:" there is no resemblance between the scenes any more than between the characters.

explains the letter of Beaumarchais, the young boy, in these words :

"First literary and absurd production, by a scamp of thirteen, who was just leaving school, to his two sisters who had recently gone to Spain. According to the custom at public schools, I had been more occupied with Latin verses than with the rules of French versification. A man has always to recommence his education on getting free from the pedants. This was copied by my poor sister Julie, who was between eleven and twelve years of age, and in whose papers I find it after more than fifty years.

"Prairial, An. VI. (May, 1798)."

This remark of Beaumarchais is intended as an excuse for all inaccuracies which occur in his French verses. I doubt whether the pupil ever made much progress in Latin poetry, although at a later period he appears rather prodigal of Latin quotations in his writings. However, to appreciate the astonishing precocity of intellect and sentiment which is shown in this letter, the reader should not forget that it comes from a child of thirteen, and from a child whose regular education had been somewhat neglected.

" Dame Guilbert et compagnie,*
 J'ai reçu la lettre polie
 Qui par vous me fut adressée
 Et je me sens l'âme pressée
 D'une telle reconnaissance,
 Qu'en Espagne tout comme en France
 Je vous aime de tout mon cœur
 Et tiens à un très-grand honneur
 D'être votre ami, votre frère.
 Songez à moi à la prière.

*

Dame Guilbert and friends,
 I have received the polite letter
 Which was addressed to me by you,
 And I feel my soul moved
 By so much gratitude
 That in Spain as in France
 I love you with all my heart,
 And hold it a very great honor
 To be your friend and brother.
 Think of me at your prayers.

(It will be remembered that Madame Guilbert was Beaumarchais' eldest sister.)

"Your letter has given me the greatest pleasure, and has rescued me from a dull feeling of melancholy which had oppressed me for some time, and which was rendering my life a burden. I can say with truth,

Que souvent il me prend envie
D'aller au bout de l'univers,
Eloigné des hommes pervers
Passer le reste de ma vie !*

"The news I received from you begins to shed a little light on my misanthropic condition ; while diverting my mind, the easy and amusing style of Lisette† changes my black disposition insensibly into a soft languor, so that, without giving up my notion of retirement, it appears to me that a companion of a different sex could not fail to throw a charm over my existence.

A ce projet l'esprit se monte,‡
Le cœur s'y trouve aussi son compte,
Et, dans les châteaux en Espagne,
Voudrait avoir gente compagne
Qui joignît à mille agréments
De l'esprit et des traits charmants ;
Beau corsage à couleur d'ivoire,
Des ses yeux sûrs de leur victoire,
Tels qu'on en voit en toi Guilbert.
Je lui voudrais cet air ouvert,
Cette taille fine et bien faite
Qu'on remarque dans la Lisette ;
Je lui voudrais de plus la fraîcheur de Fanchon,
Car, comme bien savez, quand on prend du galon. . .

* Often I am seized with a desire
To go to the end of the universe,
Far away from perverse men,
To pass the rest of my life.

† Beaumarchais' second sister, Clavijo's betrothed.

‡ At this project my imagination takes flight,
My heart is also interested in it,
And in its castles in the air
Would not be without its gentle companion,
Who should join to a thousand delights
Wit and charming features ;
A beautiful bust, the color of ivory,
Those eyes which are sure of their victory,
Such as you possess, my Guilbert.
I should wish her to have that frank expression,
That slender and well-made figure,

"But for fear you should reproach me with looking too much at the physical side, and neglecting positive advantages for passing charms, I will add that—

Je voudrais qu'avec tant de grâce*

Elle eût l'esprit de la Bécasse†

Un certain goût pour la paresse

Qu'on reproche à Tonton sans cesse

A mon Iris siérait assez,

Dans mon réduit où, jamais occupés,

Nous passerions le jour à ne rien faire,

La nuit à nous aimer, voilà notre ordinaire.

"But what madness on my part to talk to you about my reveries. I do not know whether it is on account of their success with you that I do so; but reveries concerning the sex, above all things! I, who ought to detest every thing that wears a petticoat, for the evil the race has done me.‡ But, patience, I am now out of their power; the best plan is never to get into it again."

The rest of the epistle is not in the most delicate taste, and it even contains passages which it would be difficult to quote, and which sufficiently justify the epithet of scamp, as applied by Beaumarchais to himself, an epithet which he also applies to Cherubino in the preface to the "Marriage of Figaro."

Which we remark in Lisette;

I should also wish her to have the freshness of Fanchon,

For as you know, etc.

(Fanchon was Beaumarchais' third sister.)

*

I should wish that with all this grace

She might have the wit of la Bécasse.

A certain taste for idleness

With which Tonton is incessantly reproached

Would be sufficiently becoming to my Iris;

In my retirement, troubled by no cares,

We should pass our days in idleness and love.

† The name of *la bécasse*, in the second line, is given by antiphrasis to Julie, the fourth and wittiest of the sisters; *bécasse*—literally woodcock—being here used as a synonym of goose. *Tonton*, in the fourth line, is the fifth sister, who was afterward Madame de Miron.

‡ On the subject of this passage, written when he was thirteen years old, Beaumarchais adds in a note: "I had been in love with a thoughtless girl, who laughed at me for my youth, and had just got married. I wanted at the time to kill myself." The tone of this letter, however, indicates that there was not much to be feared from his attack of amorous despair.

What I have said is, I think, sufficient to establish relation-ship between the boys of Count Almaviva and the son of Caron the watchmaker. The child was in his thirteenth year when his father interrupted his studies, in order to direct his attention altogether to watchmaking. Under his tuition he learned to make watches, *to measure time*, as he said in after life. We shall, indeed, see that an exact calculation of time and circumstances was always one of the principal elements of his power and success.

In the mean while it may be imagined that the Cherubino of the Rue St. Denis had rather a wild time of it, and that the watchmaker's apprentice became the model of all others. With a violent passion for music, which made him neglect his profession, he combined other less innocent tastes, and old M. Caron had some trouble in softening down his impetuous and somewhat dissolute disposition. In one of the numerous pamphlets which, during the period of his opulence and celebrity, were flying incessantly about him, he is represented at the age of eighteen as driven out of his father's house, and pursuing the profession of a juggler. That, however, was simply an invention. The only true part of the story is his expulsion from his father's house, although, at the same time, this expulsion was only intended to be a temporary one. Old M. Caron, not being able to do any thing with his son, decided one day to resort to strong measures; he pretended to turn him out of the house, but without throwing him on his own resources; for young Caron was at once received by certain relations and friends, who were in the secret of the father's plans. He wrote letters of the most supplicatory kind to his father, who, however, resisted for some time. At last, when he thought the lesson had been sufficiently severe, he allowed himself to be overcome by his wife's entreaties, and those of the sisters, cousins, and friends of the exile. A treaty of peace was concluded between him and his son on the subjoined conditions, which will give some idea of the influence which was still exercised in the eighteenth century by the heads of families and professions, while they will at the same time enable the reader to form a correct idea of the faults which had been committed by the young apprentice. The following is the letter in which the father informs his son that he may return to the house.

"I have read and re-read your last letter. M. Cotton* has also shown me the one you sent to him. The letters appear reasonable; the sentiments to which you give utterance would meet with my unlimited admiration if I could only look upon them as durable, for I take it for granted that they are expressed with sincerity. Your great misfortune consists in having entirely lost my confidence; however, the friendship and regard which I entertain for the three estimable friends to whose intervention you have had recourse, and the gratitude I owe them for the kindness they have shown you, induce me to give my consent in spite of myself, although I am convinced that there are four chances to one against your fulfilling your promises. Accordingly, you see what an irremediable evil it would be for your reputation if I had to send you away again.

"Understand, then, on what conditions you are to return. I must have a full and entire submission to my wishes, and marked respect in words, actions, and behavior. Remember, that if you do not exert yourself as much to please me as you have done to gain the good will of my friends, you will have proved nothing, absolutely nothing, and will only have worked against yourself. I wish not only to be obeyed and respected, but I wish you to think beforehand of what will be likely to please me.

"As regards your mother, who has urged me twenty times during the last fortnight to take you back, I shall wait for a private conversation with you to make you understand how much affection and solicitude you owe to her. These, then, are to be the conditions of my receiving you:

"1. You shall make nothing, sell nothing, cause nothing to be made or sold, directly or indirectly, except on my account; and you must no longer give way to the temptation of appropriating to yourself any thing which belongs to me; you must have nothing, absolutely nothing, but what I give you; you must receive neither watches nor any thing else to repair, under no matter what pretext, for no matter what friend, without giving me notice of it; you must never undertake any thing without giving me due notice; you must not even sell an old key without accounting to me for it.

"2. You must get up in the summer at six o'clock, and in the winter at seven; you must work until supper-time without repugnance; at whatever I give you to do you must employ the talents which Heaven has bestowed upon you, entirely with a view to becoming celebrated in your profession. Remember, that it will be shameful and dishonorable for you to occupy a low position in it, and that if you do not occupy the highest, you will deserve no sort of re-

* A banker, who was a friend and relative of the Caron family.

spect; the love of so fine a profession ought alone to penetrate your heart and occupy your mind.

"3. You must go to no more supper-parties, nor go out at all in the evening; such amusements are dangerous for you; but I consent to your dining with your friends on Sundays and holidays, on condition that I always know where you are going, and that you are always at home before nine. I recommend you at the present moment never to ask permission to break through this article, and I should advise you not to do so of your own accord.

"4. You must give up your unhappy music altogether, and, above all, must forsake the company of young men, for I will not allow you to associate with one of them. These two things have been your ruin. However, in consideration of your weakness, I will allow you a violin and a flute, but on the express condition that you only play them on working days after supper, and never in the daytime, and that you do so without disturbing the tranquillity of the neighbors and my own.*

"5. I shall avoid sending you out as much as possible; but, in case I should be obliged to do so by my business, remember that I shall never accept any insufficient excuse for your delays; you know beforehand how much they would annoy me.

"6. I shall allow you your board and eighteen francs a month, which will give you pocket-money, and enable you, by degrees, to pay your debts. It would not suit your disposition, and it would be unbecoming on my part, to make you pay for your board, and to credit you with the value of your work. If you devote yourself, as you ought to do, to the interests of my business, and if you obtain any orders by means of your own talents, I will give you a quarter share in the profit of whatever work you are instrumental in bringing; you know my disposition, and you must be aware from your own experience that I do not like to yield to another person in generosity; entitle yourself, then, to receive more from me than I have promised; but remember that henceforth I set no value on words—I reckon actions alone.

"If my conditions suit you, if you consider yourself capable of executing them in good faith, accept them, and sign your acceptance at the foot of this letter, which you are to send back to me; and in

* What an excellent man was old M. Caron! Is there an individual in Paris sufficiently unfortunate to be under the same roof with several pianos, who ever met with a father of a family so solicitous above every thing for the tranquillity of the neighbors? Old M. Caron little thought, however, that his son's passion for music, which appeared to him under so fatal an aspect, was destined to be far more profitable to him than watchmaking.

this case assure M. Paignon of my esteem and gratitude; tell him that I will do myself the honor to take dinner with him to-morrow, and prepare to return with me, and resume a place which I thought you could not have occupied so soon, if you ever did so at all."

Conformably to the paternal commands, young Caron writes on the same piece of paper the following declaration:

"Monsieur and honored Father,—I sign all your conditions in the full intention of executing them, with the assistance of the Lord; but how sadly all this recalls to me the time when these conditions and laws were far from being necessary to make me do my duty.* It is just that I should suffer humiliation, which I have really deserved; and if this and my good conduct can induce you to give me back your kindness and affection, I shall be only too happy. In faith of which I sign all that is contained in the above letter.

"A. CARON, fils."

This stroke of authority produced its effect; young Caron felt his honor at stake, gave himself up entirely to the study of watchmaking, and by way of proving to his father that he was capable of attaining the highest position in his art, at the age of twenty he had already discovered a new system of escapement† for watches. A watchmaker, then celebrated, named Lepaute, to whom he had communicated his invention, undertook to appropriate it, and announced it as his own in a number of the "*Mercure*," dated September, 1753. He flattered himself that he could easily deal with an obscure young man; but this young man was one of those vigorous and tenacious dispositions who do not let go their hold very easily. We have beneath our eyes the principal documents relating to the lawsuit to which this dispute gave rise, and which formed the commencement of his fortune and celebrity. As soon as Lepaute's announcement appeared, young Caron wrote the following letter to the "*Mercure*," and it was printed in the number

* Cherubino, at the age of eighteen imploring *the assistance of the Lord*, in order to soften down the severity of his father, is in itself a good piece of comedy, particularly as the young scapegrace lets out in the next sentence his annoyance at being treated, as he considers, like a child; but, taking it all and all, there is a tone of sincere respect in this letter which is not very common in the present day.

† "The 'escapement' is that part of a watch or clock by which the circulating motions of the wheels is converted into a vibrating one, as that of the pendulum in a clock or the balance of a watch."—WEBSTER.

for December, 1753, from which I extract it. It is the first communication made by Beaumarchais to the public, and has never been reproduced.

"I read, sir, with the greatest astonishment, in your number for September, 1753, that M. Lepaute, watchmaker to the Luxembourg, announces as his invention a new escapement for watches and clocks, which he says he has had the honor of presenting to the king and the Academy.

"It is too important, for the sake of truth and my own reputation, that I should claim this invention, and not remain silent on the subject of a breach of faith.

"It is true that on the 23d of last July, in the joy produced by my discovery, I had the weakness to intrust this escapement to M. Lepaute, that he might make use of it in a clock which M. de Julienne had ordered from him, and the inside of which, he assured me, would be seen by no one, as he was fitting it up with his pneumatic winding apparatus, and would alone have the key. But could I imagine that M. Lepaute would ever think fit to appropriate this escapement, which, as I show, had been confided to him under a pledge of secrecy!

"I do not wish to take the public by surprise, nor to induce it to take my side on the strength of my simple statement, but I earnestly beg it not to give any credit to M. Lepaute's assertions until the Academy has decided between us, and determined which of us is the author of the new escapement. M. Lepaute seems to wish to avoid discussion; he declares that his escapement, which I have not seen, bears no resemblance to mine; but, from what he says in his announcement, I imagine that it is exactly like it in principle; and that, if the commissioners whom the Academy may appoint to hear our contradictory statements find any difference in them, it will be found to proceed merely from some faults in construction in his machinery, which will help to expose the theft.

"I do not publish any of my proofs; it is necessary the commissioners should hear them for the first time in all their force; so that, whatever M. Lepaute may say or write against me, I shall maintain a profound silence until the Academy has been made acquainted with the matter, and pronounced its decision.

"The judicious public will be kind enough to wait until then. I hope for this favor from its justness, and from the patronage which it accords to the arts. I venture to flatter myself, sir, that you will consent to insert this letter in your next paper.

"CARON the Younger, Watchmaker, Rue St. Denis,
near St. Catharine's.

"Paris, Nov. 15.h, 1753."

Lepaute replied with a letter, in which, after calling attention very complacently to his various talents, his high connections, and his numerous orders, he tried to crush young Caron in his obscurity beneath the weight of a certificate, signed by three Jesuits and the Chevalier de la Morlière. Thereupon came a fresh letter from Beaumarchais in the month of January, 1754, in which he appeals again to more competent judges and to the Academy of Sciences. The dispute having made a certain noise, the Count of St. Florentin, minister of the king's household, did in fact call upon the Academy of Sciences to decide between these two watchmakers. Beaumarchais' address to the Academy, of which I possess the minute, contains the following fragment, which is curious from the solemn and respectful tone with which the young watchmaker speaks of his profession, like a worthy pupil of his father.

"Instructed I have been by my father, from the age of thirteen, in the art of watchmaking; and animated by his example and advice to occupy myself seriously in endeavoring to perfect the art, it will not appear surprising that, when only nineteen, I tried to distinguish myself in it, and to entitle myself to the esteem of the public. Escape-ments were the first objects of my attention. To do away with their existing defects, simplify them, and perfect them—such was the aim which excited my ambition. My enterprise was doubtless a rash one: so many great men, whom the application of an entire life will probably not render me capable of equaling, had worked at it without ever arriving at the point so much desired, that I ought not to have flattered myself I should ever succeed. But youth is presumptuous; and shall I not be excusable, gentlemen, if your approbation crowns my work? But what would be my grief if M. Lepaute succeeded in taking from me the glory of a discovery which you had crowned?
* * * I say nothing of the insults which M. Lepaute writes and circulates against my father and myself. Such things generally indicate a desperate cause, and I know that they always cover their originator with disgrace. For the present, gentlemen, it will be sufficient for me if your judgment secures to me the glory which my adversary wishes to deprive me of, and which I hope to receive from your justice and enlightenment. CARON the Younger."

The Academy of Sciences appointed two commissioners to examine into the question, and at the end of their report, which is very long, and which I will not inflict on the reader,

decided the matter in favor of young Caron in the following words :

Extract from the Registers of the Royal Academy of Sciences, February 23, 1754.

"MM. Camus and Montigny, who were appointed commissioners for examining into the question which had arisen between MM. Caron and Lepaute on the subject of an escapement, which they both claim to have invented, and the decision of which had been referred by the Count de St. Florentin to the Academy of Sciences, having made their report, the Academy have decided that M. Caron must be looked upon as the real author of the new watch escapement, and that M. Lepaute only imitated this invention : that the clock escapement presented to the Academy on the 4th August by M. Lepaute is a natural consequence of the watch escapement invented by M. Caron ; that in its application to clocks, this escapement is inferior to that of Graham ; but that for watches it is the most perfect yet invented, although it is, at the same time, the most difficult to make.

"The Academy confirmed this decision in its meetings of the 20th and 23d of February, in faith of which I have delivered the present certificate to M. Caron, with a copy of the report, conformably with the result of the decision of the 2d of March.

"Paris, March 4th, 1754.

"(Signed),

GRAND-JEAN DE FOUCHY,

"Perpetual Secretary of the Royal Academy of Sciences."

Thus ended Beaumarchais' first suit, which he gained, as he was destined to gain so many others. This one having given the young artist a notoriety, he took care to cultivate it ; and a year afterward, with the apparent view of doing justice to another watchmaker, named Romilly, he addressed to the "Mercure" a letter containing the following ingenious species of "puff" for himself :

"Paris, June 16, 1755.

"Sir,—I am a young artist, who have only the honor of being known to the public by the invention of a new escapement for watches, which the Academy has honored with its approbation, and which the journals spoke of last year. This success has decided me to remain a watchmaker, and I limit all my ambition to acquiring a thorough knowledge of my art. I have never looked with an envious eye on the productions of my fellow watchmakers—this letter proves it ; but, unfortunately, I can not, without impatience, see myself deprived of those slight advantages which study and perseverance have enabled me to gain. It was my warmth of temperament, of which I am afraid age does not cure me, that made me de-

fend with so much ardor the legitimate claim which I had to my own invention of the escapement, when it was disputed about eighteen months since * * *

"I take advantage of this opportunity to reply to some objections which have been made to my escapement in various publications. It has been said that when this escapement is used, the watches can not be made either flat or small, which, if it were true, would render the best escapement known very inconvenient."

Some technical details follow, after which Beaumarchais concludes in these words:

"By this means I make watches as flat as can be desired—flatter than they have ever yet been made, while this advantage does not in any way diminish their goodness. The first of these simplified watches is in the hands of the king; his majesty has worn it a year, and is very pleased with it. If the first objection can be answered by facts, the second can be replied to in the same manner. I had the honor to present Madame de Pompadour, a few days since, with a watch in a ring of this new and simplified make—the smallest which has ever been constructed; it is only four lines and a half in diameter, and two thirds of a line in height between the plates. To render the thing more convenient, I have substituted for the usual key a hoop all round the dial plate, from which a little hook stands out; by pulling this hook with the nail about two thirds round the dial plate, you wind up the watch, and it goes thirty hours. Before taking it to Madame de Pompadour, I saw that it corresponded exactly with my clock which marks the seconds for five days. Accordingly, with my escapement and my mode of construction, excellent watches can be made as flat and as small as may be thought fit.

"I have the honor, &c.,

"CARON the Younger, Watchmaker to the King."

This letter and signature prove that young Caron has already made a certain progress: instead of signing himself "Watchmaker" simply, he now signs "Watchmaker to the King." He has his *entrées* to the chateau of Versailles, not as a musician, which has been often stated, but, in the first instance, as watchmaker to the king, princes, and princesses. In order to show thoroughly what his position was at the time, we will quote another passage from a letter written by him to one of his cousins who was a watchmaker in London, dated July 31, 1754:

"I have at last delivered the watch to the king, by whom I was

fortunate enough to be recognized at once,* and who remembered my name. His majesty commanded me to wind it up, and explain it to all the courtiers who were at the *levée*, and never did his majesty receive an artist with so much kindness: he wished to understand every detail. It was then that I had occasion to offer you many thanks for the microscope, which every one considered admirable. The king made use of it to examine the watch in Madame de Pompadour's ring, which is only four lines in diameter, and which was much admired, although it is not finished. The king asked me to make him a repeater, in the same style on which I am at present engaged. All the courtiers follow the example of the king, and each one wishes to be attended to first. I have also made Mademoiselle Victoire a curious little clock, in the style of my watches, which the king wished to make her a present of: it has two dials, and shows the time whichever way you look at it. * * * Remember, my dear cousin, that this is a young man whom you have taken under your patronage, and who, through your kindness, hopes to become a member of the Society of London. What obligations I should be under to you if you would occupy yourself about it with your friends."

Here finishes the first period of Beaumarchais' life. He is as yet only a young watchmaker; but this young watchmaker can at the same time distinguish himself in his art, assert his own position, and defend himself. His first step in his profession is a discovery, and his first polemical essay is a triumph over an adversary who is apparently a much more redoubtable person than himself. The position of Beaumarchais is about to be altered, but his qualities will remain the same. A woman's love is about to open suddenly a new career before him, for which he did not seem to have been made: in it he will exhibit that mixture of perspicacity, energy, elasticity, and obstinacy which characterize him, and in a more vast and more elevated sphere we shall recognize the clever combatant whose first struggle and first triumph we have just narrated.

* This passage indicates that Beaumarchais had already seen Louis XV.; on what occasion I can not say, but doubtless in the capacity of watchmaker, and probably after his victory over Lepaute before the Academy of Sciences.

CHAPTER III.

Beaumarchais' Appearance at Court.—Court Titles.—The Controller of the Pantry.—Beaumarchais' first Marriage.—His Position with "Mesdames de France."—The inexpert Watchmaker.—A Duel without Seconds.—A Debt of Honor.—Beaumarchais' Literary Education.

UNTIL the age of twenty-four, young Caron's ambition was limited to selling large numbers of watches to the king, the princes, and the courtiers. How did he obtain the idea of stepping over the boundary which separated him from the aristocracy and becoming a noble? This is the proper place for introducing an unpublished sketch by Gudin, which appears to have been made from life. "As soon as Beaumarchais appeared at Versailles, the women were struck with his lofty stature, his slender and elegant figure, the regularity of his features, his bright, animated complexion, his confident bearing, that air of command which seemed to raise him above all who surrounded him, and, finally, with that involuntary ardor which he exhibited on their appearance."

It is easy to see from this portrait that modesty was never the prevailing characteristic of Beaumarchais' physiognomy, and that, if he was calculated to please the ladies of the period, who were rather fond of the kind of beauty depicted to us by Gudin, he must, on the other hand, have had less success with the men, and have obtained at an early period that reputation for coxcombry which may be said to have been the cause of all the bad feeling exhibited toward him. This animosity interfered with his own tranquillity and with his reputation, and made him exclaim, in one of his old Memorials against Goëzman, "But if I was a coxcomb, does it follow that I was an ogre?"

However, in 1755, young Caron, being nothing but a watchmaker, was not in a position to make the courtiers who ordered watches from him take umbrage. He began, then, by reaping the benefits of his good looks, without in the first instance

experiencing any of their ill effects. A lady who had seen him at Versailles called upon him in Paris, at his shop, in the Rue St. Denis, on the pretext of bringing him a watch to repair. She was not exactly a noble lady—she was the wife of an officer of the king's pantry, *contrôleur de la bouche*, or, to be more dignified and more exact, of a *contrôleur clerc d'office de la maison du roi*, who, by the way, had the same Christian name as Beaumarchais, being called Pierre Augustin Franquet. The office held by the husband was one of the thousand functions attached to the court which our kings used to create formerly when they were in want of money, and which, when they had once been sold, could be transmitted by the holder to heirs or to other purchasers, if the prince gave his consent. It is with reference to this that Montesquieu says, in his "Lettres Persanes," "The King of France has no gold mines like the King of Spain, his neighbor, but he has far greater wealth in the vanity of his subjects, which is more inexhaustible than any mine. He has been known to undertake or continue a war without any resources but the titles of honor which he had to sell, and, owing to a miracle of human conceit, his troops were paid, his towns fortified, and his fleet equipped." Those who would wish to form an idea of the immense variety of these court places have only to consult one of the almanacs which were published before the Revolution, under the title of "*Almanac de Versailles*:" they will find all sorts of burlesque offices, such as *Cravat-tyer in Ordinary to the King*, or *Captain of the Greyhounds of the Chamber*, which had probably cost more money than they gave work to the holders.*

The controller, whose wife had taken notice of Beaumarchais, was very old and infirm. The wife herself was no longer in the bloom of youth. It appears from one of Beaumar-

* In the "Etat de la France" for 1749 (vol. i., p. 273) there is a whole chapter entitled "Greyhounds of the Chamber." The *captain* is M. Zachaire de Vassan, and Michel de Vassan, his son, is his appointed successor. He receives 2466 francs for his wages. There are also three *valets* and guards attached to the Greyhounds of the Chamber. There are, moreover, the *little dogs of the King's Chamber*, who are under the care of M. Antoine, that gentleman receiving 1446 francs as wages, besides 200 francs for his livery. The pastry-cook of the king has to provide seven biscuits a day for his majesty's little dogs.

chais' notes that she was six years older than himself, and, consequently, in 1755, she was thirty; but she was still very beautiful, and when she came blushing with her watch to Beaumarchais, there was no need to tell him to bring it back himself. "The young artist," says Gudin, "politely claimed the honor of bringing back the watch as soon as he had repaired it. This event, which appeared an ordinary one, had an effect on his life, and gave him a new existence."

At the end of some months, M. Franquet confessed that his old age and infirmities prevented him from performing his functions as controller in a suitable manner, and that he could not do better than give up the place to young Caron, in consideration of an annuity which was guaranteed by the father.

With this new career open to him, the young watchmaker gave up his profession, and was invested with the functions of controller by a royal patent, dated November 9, 1755.* This, the first office at court held by Beaumarchais, differed from the others so far that it was not absolutely a sinecure. Under the direction of the controller in ordinary of the royal mantle were sixteen clerks, controllers of the pantry, who were employed every quarter, four at a time. Their functions are described as follows in the "*Etat de la France*" for 1749: "They keep the ordinary and extraordinary books of the expenses of the king's household, and have a voice and a seat in the bureau. They have six hundred francs in wages, of which

* The following is an extract from the patent, in which Beaumarchais is called Caron only: "On the part of the king. To the grand-master of France, first master and ordinary masters of our hotel, masters and controllers of our pantry and account-room, greeting: On the good and trustworthy report which has been made to us, of the honor of Pierre-Augustin Caron, and of his zeal and affection for our service; on account of this we have this day appointed him, and by these presents signed with our hand do now appoint him, to the office of one of the clerk-controllers of the pantry of our household, left vacant by the resignation of Pierre-Augustin Franquet, its last holder, to be possessed and exercised by him; whereof he shall enjoy and use all the honors, authority, privileges, freedom, liberties, wages, rights, &c.

"Given at Versailles, under the seal of our trust, November 9, 1755.

"LOUIS."

And, lower down, "By the king,
(Signed),

"PHELIPPEAUX."

they only receive four hundred and fifty, and liveries in kind, making altogether about fifteen hundred francs. The controllers are attached to the bureau on the days when the large staff is not carried; they serve at the king's table with their swords by their sides, and place the dishes on the table with their own hands. Subordinately to the officers of the hotel and the other superior officers, they direct the seven pantries of the palace, the officers of which owe them obedience in all matters relating to their functions. They take their meals at the table of the masters of the hotel, or at that of the former grand-master. One of those who are waiting on the king is also entitled to eat at the table of the almoners." In the rules drawn up for his household in 1681 by Louis XIV., and kept by his successors, we find, in article 21, these directions: "His majesty's meat shall be carried in the following order: two of the guards shall march first, afterward the usher of the hall, the master of the hotel with his staff, the gentleman (*gentil-homme*) serving as bread-bearer, the controller-general, the clerk-controller of the pantry and those who carry the meat, the groom of the kitchen, the keeper of the plate, &c." Fancy the future author of the "Marriage of Figaro" at his post, and in the exercise of his functions, with his sword at his side, walking before his majesty's meat previously to placing it himself on the table!

Two months after Beaumarchais' entrance at the court, on the third of January, 1756, the old man who had sold his place died of apoplexy, and eleven months afterward, on the 22d November, 1756, young Caron married Franquet's widow, whose maiden name was Marie Madeleine Aubertin. Then for the first time, in the beginning of 1757, he added to his own name that of Beaumarchais, which he was destined to render so celebrated. The manuscript of Gudin tells us that this pretty name was borrowed from a *very small fief* belonging to young Caron's wife. I do not know exactly where this very small *fief* was situate; I am ignorant whether it was a *fief servant*, or a *fief de haubert*, or simply a *fief* of the imagination: it is, however, certain that this event supplied the judge Goëzman with the only tolerable piece of pleasantry which his "Memorials against Beaumarchais" contain, where he says, "M.

Caron borrowed the name of Beaumarchais from one of his wives, and lent it to one of his sisters."

Although he called himself Monsieur de Beaumarchais, the young controller was not yet a noble: his little office did not cost enough to confer a title of nobility on the holder. It was not until five years afterward, in 1761, when he had given 85,000 francs for the very noble and very useless office of secretary to the king, that he acquired the right to bear the name of his *fief*, and to make, in 1773, the following remarkable reply to the Councilor Goëzman, who, though a noble of very recent origin, was taunting him with being a plebeian: "I reserve for consultation the point whether I have not a right to complain of your searching into my family archives, and reminding people of my origin, which had been almost forgotten. Are you aware that I can already prove twenty years of nobility, and that this title of nobility is really my own, on good parchment, sealed with the grand seal of yellow wax? that it is not, like that of a great many persons, uncertain, and to be taken on trust, and that no one would dare to deny my right to it—for *I have the receipt!*" This sarcasm, which is thoroughly in the style of Beaumarchais, tells us more, with its comic insolence, than hosts of books could do of the degradation of the aristocratic principle in France at the approach of the Revolution.

The comfortable circumstances for which Beaumarchais was indebted to his first marriage did not last long: in less than a year afterward he lost his wife, who died on the 29th September, 1757, having been carried off very rapidly by typhus fever. This coincidence of the death of an infirm old man being followed by that of a woman of thirty-one, who had long been suffering from a disease of the lungs, and who was married to a young man of twenty-five, for whom she had conceived a violent passion—this coincidence was in itself, physiologically speaking, by no means an extraordinary one, and, accordingly, in the first instance, no one noticed it. It was not until a later period, when the position of Beaumarchais had become sufficiently brilliant to excite envy, that the atrocious rumors of poisoning, so common in the eighteenth century, were circulated against him. When, by a deplorable fa-

tality, after also losing his second wife, he found himself engaged in a contest with adversaries who had no respect for any thing, these abominable calumnies assumed such a consistency that he had to undergo the pain of defending himself publicly from them, by appealing to the four physicians who had attended his first wife, and the five who had attended his second, and to prove that the death of each of them, so far from enriching him, had left him without a farthing. The unpublished documents which I have before me fully confirm this assertion.

Thus, to speak of his first marriage only, the author of the memorials against Goëzman expresses himself as follows: "Owing to my not having deposited my marriage contract, the death of my first wife left me penniless in the strict sense of the word, overwhelmed with debts, with certain claims none of which I chose to follow up, in order to avoid having to go to law with relatives, of whom up to that period I could speak only in the highest terms." This delay with regard to the registration of the contract is mentioned, at the end of the contract itself; and the fact proves that young Beaumarchais thought so little of the probabilities of his wife dying, that he had not even taken the trouble to insure his own interests in case of her demise. Other documents prove that he gave back his wife's property, partly to the relatives of her first husband, and partly to her own brothers, who, for sixteen years after her death, remained on very good terms with their sister's husband.

This good understanding was not brought to an end until 1773, at a period when the position of Beaumarchais, who was surrounded by enemies and engaged in ruinous law proceedings, seemed to invite all evil-minded persons to the destruction of his fortune: it was then that one of the relatives of his first wife urged the others to combine against him and to declare themselves his creditors, whereas they were in point of fact his debtors, he having paid them more than their share when liquidating their claims upon his wife's property. After a series of lawsuits, which lasted several years, a final judgment declared them to be in his debt: then they began to write letters of supplication to Beaumarchais, and, although

they had probably helped to blacken his reputation, faithful to his easy, forgiving nature, he made them a present of the debt. The above is the exact truth of the matter. As to the other points, it will be sufficient, in order to defend the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" from the infamous calumnies which will be found, in the course of this narrative, to have been directed against him, to show how he lived in the privacy of his family: it will be acknowledged at once that such a man, as Voltaire said, could not be a poisoner, and the only thing left for our astonishment will be that such perfidious and cruel attacks did not have the effect of altering the kindness and gayety of his natural disposition.

Thus, in beginning the world, Beaumarchais received from fate that mixture of good and bad fortune which was to characterize his whole career, and to keep his temper and wit continually on the stretch. The death of his first wife threw him back into a state of poverty, but he had kept his trifling appointment at the court; this gave him a footing there, and soon presented him with an opportunity of gaining all, and even more than he had lost.

The reader has not forgotten that, from his youth, he had had a passion for music; he sang with taste, and was a good performer on the flute and harp. This latter instrument, which was then but little known in France,* was beginning to be much in vogue. Beaumarchais gave himself up to the study of the harp; he even introduced an improvement in the arrangement of the pedals, as he had previously improved the mechanism of the watch. The reputation which he had obtained as a harpist in several drawing-rooms at the court and in the city soon reached the ears of "Mesdames de France," the daughters of Louis XV. These four sisters, whose retired mode of life and pious habits formed a happy contrast with the latter years of their father's reign,† sought to relieve

* In Diderot's letters to Mademoiselle Voland, dated 1760, we read the following: "I had been invited last week, by Count Oginski, to hear him play the harp. *I was not acquainted with this instrument; it must be one of the first invented by man. I like the harp, but still it is less pathetic than the mandore.*"

† It is well known by what vulgar nicknames Louis XV. used to call his daughters in private life. He had named Madame Victoire *Coche*,

the monotony of their existence by devoting themselves to a variety of studies. We read in the *Memoirs of Madame Campan* that the study of languages, mathematics, and even watch-making, occupied their leisure hours in succession. They were especially fond of music: Madame Adelaide, for instance, played every instrument, from the horn to the Jew's-harp. The reader will remember that Beaumarchais had already had occasion to make a clock of a new description for Madame Victoire. When the princesses heard that the young watch-maker, who had become one of the controllers of the king's household, was remarkable for his talent on the harp, they desired to hear him. He continued to make himself both agreeable and useful: they expressed a wish to take lessons from him, but it was long before he became the organizer of, and principal performer at, a family concert which the princesses gave every week, and which was generally honored with the presence of the king, the dauphin, and the Queen Maria Leczinska, and to which only a very few persons were admitted.

We need hardly say that in this august society, where not only the dignity of supreme rank, but also the purest virtue were represented by the queen and princesses, the young artist threw aside the vaporish and affected airs which, judging from Gudin's sketch, he must have possessed to a considerable extent. If he was a little conceited, he was intelligent to a much greater extent; and to conform to circumstances, to adapt himself to the dispositions of those whom he wished to please, was always one of his talents. Having left a shop to enter suddenly upon so lofty a sphere, he was obliged to be constantly on his guard; for his position was delicate, perplexing, and sufficiently enviable to produce those bitter jealousies which are only found in courts and behind the scenes—in two kinds of theatres, each of which has the effect of exciting the bad passions of the human heart in the highest degree. He was neither a music-master, nor a servant, nor a noble; and he gave lessons to the princesses without receiving any payment in return: he either composed or purchased all the music they played: he was allowed to give evidence, not only Madame Adelaide *Loque*, Madame Sophie *Graille*, and Madame Louise *Chiffe*.

of his talent, but also of his wit, in the private parties of the royal family, in which the principal object was to procure relief from the wearisomeness of etiquette, and in which the young and agreeable commoner could eclipse nobles of the highest descent. One day Louis XV., being anxious to hear him play the harp, offered him his own arm-chair, and forced him to sit down in it in spite of his refusals. On another occasion the dauphin, with whose austere disposition Beaumarchais was acquainted, and to whom he accordingly addressed remarks which princes of that period were not accustomed to hear, said of him, "He is the only man who speaks the truth to me." This was quite enough to set all the men who were suffering from wounded vanity against a musician who had attained so high a position, and who a few years previously had been seen coming to court with watches to sell. Let us add, that this young Beaumarchais, who was respectful, yielding, and obliging to those in whose good intentions he had confidence, was never silent before his declared enemies; that he replied with refined satire to expressions of contempt which were not always free from coarseness; and that, favored by all the attractions of youth, good looks, intelligence, and talent, he met even at Versailles with ladies who were not blinded by their aristocratic prejudices; finally, let it be remembered that modesty was not his forte, and it will be understood how, at a very early period, there was formed against him what La Harpe calls very properly a sort of secret and inveterate hatred, which aimed at nothing else than his utter ruin. First of all, he had to put up with all sorts of annoyances; traps were laid in order to make him commit himself; he was the subject of impertinent remarks, to meet which he had need of all his energy and presence of mind. The story of the watch is well known. A courtier, who had boasted that he would disconcert the protégé of "Mesdames de France," met him in the midst of a numerous group, just as he was coming out of the princesses' apartment, arrayed in his court suit, and said, as he handed him a very fine watch, "Sir, as you understand watchmaking, I wish you would have the kindness to examine my watch; it is out of order." "Sir," replied Beaumarchais, calmly, "since I have ceased to practice

the art, I have become very inexpert." "Oh, sir, do not refuse me the favor I ask." "Very well; but I give you notice that I have become very awkward." Then, taking the watch, he opened it, raised it in the air, and pretending to examine it, let it fall to the ground. Upon which he made a low bow to the proprietor of the watch, saying, "I had warned you, sir, of my extreme awkwardness." He then walked away, leaving the nobleman to pick up the remains of his watch.

On another occasion, some one told Beaumarchais that the princesses had been informed that he lived on the worst terms with his father, and that they were very much displeased with him. Instead of refuting this calumny in a direct manner, he returned to Paris, and, under the pretext of showing his father the chateau of Versailles, brought him back with him, took him every where, and made a point of meeting the princesses several times while he was thus occupied. In the evening he presented himself to the princesses, leaving his father in the ante-chamber. He was received very coolly; however, one of them asked him, from curiosity, with whom he had been walking about all day. "With my father," replied the young man. The princesses were astonished. An explanation naturally ensued. Beaumarchais solicited for his father the honor of being admitted to their presence, and the old watchmaker himself undertook to sound the praises of his son. The reader need not be told that he did so most satisfactorily.

It is said that Beaumarchais also fell into disgrace with the princesses owing to an observation which would be made, not by a coxcomb, but by a fool. It is asserted that, on seeing a full-length portrait of Mademoiselle Adelaide playing the harp, he said before her, "There is only one essential thing absent from this picture, namely, the portrait of the master." This absurd tale happens to have its origin in one of those ill-natured actions to which the young artist was constantly exposed. A fan had been offered to the princesses, on which they were represented at the little concert they were in the habit of giving every week, with all the persons who took part in it, except one; the very person had been intentionally omitted who, in a musical point of view, occupied the first place,

that is to say, Beaumarchais. The princesses, when they showed him the fan, which he looked at with a smile, themselves pointed out this ill-natured omission, declaring they did not want a picture in which the painter had disdained to represent their master. The jealousy which was excited by the princesses' protégé was not confined to small calumnies, it extended as far as direct insult. Having been grossly insulted by a courtier, whom the manuscript of Gudin and the unpublished correspondence mention only as the Chevalier de C——, Beaumarchais was obliged to look upon the affront as a challenge.

"They mounted their horses," says Gudin, "and repaired to the walls of Meudon, beneath which they fought. Beaumarchais had the sad good fortune to plunge his sword into the bosom of his adversary; but when, on drawing it out, he saw the blood issue in a copious stream, and his enemy fall to the ground, he was seized with grief, and thought only of the best means of assisting him.

"He took his own handkerchief, and fastened it as best he could over the wound, so as to stop the blood and prevent his former adversary from fainting. 'Fly!' said the latter, 'fly, M. de Beaumarchais. You are lost if you are seen—if it becomes known that you have taken my life.' 'You must have help,' replied Beaumarchais; 'I will obtain it for you.' He mounted his horse, hurried to the village of Meudon, asked for a surgeon, pointed out to him the place where the wounded man was lying, showed him the way to the spot, went off at full gallop, and came back to Paris to determine what he should do.

"His first care was to ascertain whether the Chevalier de C—— was still alive. He had been removed to Paris, but his life was despaired of. He heard that the patient refused to give up the name of the man who had wounded him so severely. 'I have what I deserve,' he said. 'To please persons for whom I had no esteem, I insulted an honest man who had never offended me in any way.'

"His relatives and friends could get no answer from him during the eight days through which he lingered. He carried with him to the tomb the name of the person who had deprived him of life, and left him with the eternal regret of having taken away the life of a man who was worthy of every esteem, who had been sufficiently generous to fear to compromise him by the slightest indiscretion.

"'Ah, my young friend,' said Beaumarchais to me one day, when I was joking about some duel which was then the common subject of conversation, 'you do not know what despair a man feels when he

finds the hilt of his sword on his enemy's breast.' He then related to me this adventure, which was still afflicting him, although many years had elapsed since it had taken place. He never mentioned it without grief, and I should probably never have heard of it if he had not thought it right to make me feel how dangerous it might be to joke about such fatal affairs, the number of which is increased by frivolity much more than by bravery.

"Before the chevalier died, when it was still uncertain whether he might not let the secret escape him, and whether the family would not thereupon demand vengeance, Beaumarchais sought the intercession of the princesses, to whom he communicated all the details of the unhappy affair. They informed the king of it, and his paternal goodness made him reply, 'Arrange it in such a way, my children, that I may not hear of it.'

"The august princesses took all possible precautions; but the generosity of the dying man rendered them unnecessary."*

After the somewhat ornate recital of Gudin, I felt it necessary to verify his statement, and discovered the fact and date of the duel noted down by Beaumarchais himself, in his correspondence, with reference to another incident which occurred shortly afterward, and which will give a better idea than any writing of my own could do of the arrogance of certain noblemen toward this commoner, whom they looked upon as an intruder. Beaumarchais, in the year 1763, happened to be at a ball at Versailles where the company were playing at cards. A man of rank, named M. de Sablières, with whom he was not acquainted, borrowed thirty-five louis from him. At the end of three weeks, Beaumarchais, hearing nothing of these thirty-five louis, wrote to the nobleman in question, who replied that he would send the thirty-five louis the next day or the day after. Three weeks more elapsed; Beaumarchais wrote a second time, but received no answer. He became impatient, and sent M. de Sablières a third letter, which was as follows:

"After you have broken the written promise which I received from you, sir, I should be wrong to feel astonished at your abstaining from answering my last letter; one is a natural consequence of the other. The fact of your forgetting yourself does not, of course, authorize me to address reproaches to you. You owe me neither politeness nor attention; not having the honor to be one of your friends, what right

* It would appear, from Gudin's statement, that the adversaries fought without seconds. I reproduce it exactly as he wrote it.

should I have to expect them from one who fails to execute duties of a more essential nature? This letter, then, is only intended to remind you once more of a debt of thirty-five louis, which was contracted at the house of a mutual friend, with no other security than that of the debtor's honor and the respect which was due by both of us to the house which had brought us together. Another consideration, which is not of less weight, is that the money you owe me was not won from me on the chance of a card, but that I lent it you out of my own pocket, and perhaps deprived myself thereby of an advantage which I might have been allowed to hope for if I had chosen to play rather than to oblige you.

"If, unfortunately, this letter does not produce on you the effect which it would produce on me in your place, you will not think me wrong if I place between us a respectable third person, who is the natural judge in matters of this kind.

"I shall wait for your answer until the day after to-morrow. I am happy to have been able to show you, by the moderation of my conduct, the perfect consideration with which I have the honor to be,

"Sir, yours, &c., DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"March 29th, 1763."

Now comes the answer of M. de Sablières, the man of rank, writing to the son of the watchmaker, Caron. I reproduce his letter, word for word, with all the faults of orthography and grammar which adorn it.

"Je sçois que je suis assés malheureux que de vous devoirs trente-cinq louis, j'ignore que cela puisse me desonorés quand on a la bonne volontés de les rendre, ma fasson de penssés, Monsieur, est connu, et lorsque je ne serés plus votre débiteur je me fairés connoitre à vous par des terme qui seront différent des votre. Samedy matin, je vous demenderés un rendezvous pour m'acquiter des trente-cinq louis et vous remercier des choses honnettes que vous avés la bontés de vous servir dans votre letre; je fairés en sorte dy repondre le mieux qu'il me sera possible, et je me flatte que dicy à ce tems vous voudrés bien avoir une idée moins desavantageuse. Soyés convaincu que cest deux fois vints quatre heure vont me paroître bien longue; quand au respectable tiers que vous me menassés, je le respecte, mais je fais on ne peut pas moins de cas des menasse, et je sçois encore moins de gré de la modération. Samedy vous aurés vos trente-cinq louis je vous en donne ma parolle, j'ignore si à mon tours je serés assez heureux pour repondre de ma modération. En attendans de metre aquittes de tout ce que je vous dois, je suis, Monsieur, comme vous les désireres, votre très humble et, etc. SABLIERES."

"I know that I am unfortunate enough to owe you thirty-five

louis ;* I am ignorant how that can dishonor me when I have the wish to return them. My way of thinking, sir, is known, and when I am no longer your debtor I shall make you acquainted with me by means very different from those which you employ. I will request you to appoint a rendezvous for Saturday, that I may repay you the thirty-five louis, and thank you for the polite things which you have been kind enough to introduce into your letter. I shall endeavor to reply to them in the best way I can, and I flatter myself that between now and the period of our meeting you will be kind enough to form a less unfavorable opinion of me. Rest assured that those twice twenty-four hours will appear very long to me ; as for the respectable third person with whom you threaten me, I respect him, but I pay the least possible attention to menaces, and appreciate moderation even less. On Saturday you shall have your thirty-five louis : I give you my word for it ; I can not say in my turn whether I shall be sufficiently fortunate to be sure of my moderation. Until I have paid you all I owe you, I am, sir, as you may wish it, your very humble, &c.,

SABLIÈRES."

This missive announces no very pacific intentions. Beaumarchais, who had just killed a man at a period when the laws against dueling were still very severe, replied by another letter, in which he commences by denying all intention of wounding the honor of this petulant M. de Sablières, and which he terminates as follows :

"My letter being now explained, I have the honor to announce to you that I shall wait at home all Saturday morning to see the effect of your third promise. You can not say, you tell me, whether you will be sufficiently fortunate to be sure of your moderation. From the warmth of your style, it would appear that you have no great command over it when you write ; but you may depend upon my not aggravating an evil, of which I am not the author, by losing my own, if I can avoid doing so. After this assurance on my part, if it be your intention to go beyond the limits of a civil explanation, and to push things to extremities, which I will not, however, assume to be the case, from what you say in the heat of the moment, you will find, sir, that I am as firm in repelling insult as I endeavor to be careful in repressing all that may tend to produce it. I do not fear, then, to assure you again that I have the honor to be, with all possible consideration, sir, your very humble, &c.,

"DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

* We have, of course, made no attempt to reproduce in our English version the faults by which the original is characterized.—TRANS.

"P.S.—I keep a copy of this letter, as also of the former one, in order that the purity of my intentions may help to justify me in case of misfortune ; but I hope to convince you on Saturday that, far from seeking an affair, no one at the present moment ought to use more efforts than myself to avoid such things.

"I can not explain myself in writing.

"March 31, 1763."

On the copy of this same letter are written, in Beaumarchais' hand, the following lines, which explain the postscript and refer to the duel with the Chevalier de C——, of which we have before spoken.

"This took place eight or ten days after my unfortunate affair with the Chevalier de C——, whose imprudence cost him his life ; which affair would have ruined me but for the kindness of the princesses, who spoke to the king. M. de Sablières had the postscript of my letter explained to him by Laumur, at whose house I had lent him the thirty-five louis, and the amusing part of it was, that this deprived him of all desire to bring me the money himself."

This detail will be sufficient to explain what a difficult situation was that of a young *parvenu*, who was sufficiently favored by nature and fortune to inspire a great deal of jealousy, and too recently emerged from the shop to be received on a footing of equality. It is not astonishing that Beaumarchais' character was formed early in the midst of so many obstacles.

However, the favor in which he stood with the princesses, and which dated from 1759, had long been more enviable in appearance than useful in reality. Although he had no resources beyond the income attached to the office of controller, he was not only obliged to place his time gratuitously at the disposal of the princesses, to say nothing of expenses connected with the concerts, which were often a great burden to him, but he sometimes even found himself obliged to appear in the character of a *grand seigneur*, and to advance money for the purchase of expensive instruments, which was not returned to him with any great haste. Although very desirous to become rich, he was too clever to compromise his credit by receiving pecuniary payment which would have at once placed him in the position of a hired servant. While he was waiting for a favorable opportunity to profit by his position, he at the same

time wished to retain the right of saying what he did say at a later period: "I have passed four years in entitling myself to the good wishes of the princesses, by the most assiduous and *disinterested* attention, in connection with their different kinds of amusement."

Now "Mesdames," like all other women, especially princesses, had the most varied fancies, which it was necessary to gratify at once. The correspondence of Madame du Deffant contains a very curious story of a box of preserved Orleans quinces, which were desired so impatiently by Madame Victoire, that the king, her father, sent a messenger flying to M. de Choiseul, the prime minister, who forwarded a dispatch with equal haste to the Bishop of Orleans, who was waked at three in the morning to receive, to his great alarm, a missive from Louis XV., couched in the following terms:

"Monsieur l'Evêque d'Orléans, my daughters wish for some *cotignac*; they want very small boxes: send some. If you have none, I beg you will"

In this part of the letter there was a drawing of a sedan chair, and underneath the chair,

"send immediately into your episcopal town to get some: let the boxes be very small; and, Monsieur l'Evêque d'Orléans, may God have you in his holy keeping. LOUIS."

Lower down was this postscript:

"The sedan chair does not mean any thing; it was drawn by my daughter on this sheet of paper, which I happened to find near me."

A courier was at once dispatched to Orleans. The *cotignac*, says Madame du Deffant, arrived the following day; they no longer cared for it.

It often happened to Beaumarchais to receive commissions which somewhat recall the story of the *cotignac*, with this difference, that the young and needy music-master had not always—like the Bishop of Orleans—a courier at his disposition. Here, for example, is a letter which was addressed to him by Madame Victoire's head lady in waiting:

"Madame Victoire has taken a fancy to-day, sir, to play the tambourine, and desires me to write to you directly that you may get her one as soon as you possibly can. I hope, sir, your cold has left you,

and that you will be able to execute Madame's commission with promptitude.

"I have the honor to be, sir, your very humble servant,
"DE BOUCHEMAN-COUSTILLIER."

It was necessary to purchase immediately a tambourine fit for the princess's acceptance. The next day a harp was wanted, the day afterward a flute, and so on. When young Beaumarchais had exhausted his purse, which was at that time very scanty, in paying the tradesmen, and had become rather tired of waiting, he sent his bill with much humility to Madame d'Hoppen, the superintendent of the princess's household, accompanied by the following observations:

"I beg, Madame, that you will have the kindness to observe that I am responsible for the payment of 844 livres, which remain due, as I was unable to advance them myself, having paid away all the money I had; and I beg you not to forget that I am, in consequence, entirely without a sou.

Besides the	1852 livres,
Madame Victoire owes, on a balance of account	15 "
For a book in morocco, gilt, and bearing her arms....	36 "
And for the copying of the music in the said book...	36 "
Total.....	1939 liv. 10s.

which makes 80 *louis* and 19 *livres* 10s.

"I do not reckon all the coaches I have had to take in going to the different workmen, nearly all of whom live in the suburbs, nor the messages which I have had to send, as I took no note of the expenses, and am not in the habit of doing so with the princesses. Do not forget, I beg, that Madame Sophie* owes me five *louis*. In hard times one is obliged to collect the smallest sums. You know my respect and regard for you. I shall say no more on the subject."

The impatience with which Beaumarchais waited for the opportunity of profiting by his position with the princesses is then explicable enough. Literature appearing to him an ungrateful profession, he did not wish to give himself to it until he could regard it only as an amusement. In the mean while, however, he wrote a great deal. From the moment of his appearance at court, he seems to have felt the necessity of completing his unfinished education. His papers of the period in question contain a mass of sheets, on which he has jotted down

* Louis XV.'s third daughter.

his own ideas mixed up with quotations, borrowed from a number of authors, on all sorts of subjects. In these quotations I observe a certain predilection for the writers of the sixteenth century, for Montaigne, and, above all, for Rabelais, whose free, copious, bold style, so prodigal of epithets, comes out sometimes in the "Barber of Seville" and "Marriage of Figaro," appearing occasionally in combination with the somewhat affected manner of Marivaux.

Although he never had any very remarkable poetic talents, and often mixed with his happiest lines others of a rather commonplace description, Beaumarchais had at that time a passion for couplets, and even attempted verses of a higher flight; he wrote, during this period of his youth, a poem of about three hundred verses, on two given rhymes, which, without rising above the mediocre, appears to have been composed with much facility. These first attempts of Beaumarchais do not give evidence of much original talent. His vocation for poetry and literature does not appear as yet to have been very marked. He appears to have been more struck with the necessity of making his way, and getting an income and a carriage, than with that of cultivating the Muses. On this subject he has the same opinions as his patron Voltaire, who says, somewhere or other, "I had seen so many men of letters who were needy and despised, that I had long determined not to increase their number; in France, you must either be the anvil or the hammer—I was born an anvil." Every one knows how Voltaire became a hammer: a rich contractor, Paris du Verney, gave him a considerable interest in the supplies to be furnished to the army during the war of 1741. The products of this first operation, judiciously invested in commerce, at last brought the patriarch of Ferney an income of 130,000 livres (about \$25,000). It was fated that the very man who had enriched Voltaire should also lay the foundation of Beaumarchais' fortune.

CHAPTER IV.

Beaumarchais and Paris du Verney.—The Grand Rangership of Rivers and Forests.—Beaumarchais Lieutenant-general of Preserves.

PARIS DU VERNEY was the third of the four brothers Paris, the celebrated financiers of the 18th century, who from the most humble origin (they were the sons of an innkeeper at Moras, in Dauphiné) had raised themselves to the most brilliant position. Du Verney, the most distinguished of the four brothers,* took an active part during more than fifty years in all the great affairs of administration and finance. Voltaire, who had excellent reasons for admiring him, sometimes speaks of him in his works as a man of high genius. He was a man of talent and influence, who contrived to maintain his position with Madame de Prie as he had done with Madame de Pompadour.

"It is well known," writes Madame de Tencin to the Duke of Richélieu in 1743, "that the Paris family are no unimportant personages. They have a great many friends, all sorts of secret influences, and plenty of money to work them with. After that, only judge to what extent they are capable of benefiting or injuring people."

Madame du Hausset, in her interesting *Memoirs* on Madame de Pompadour, speaks in the following terms of the influence of Du Verney:

"M. du Verney was Madame's confidential man in all that concerned the war—a subject he was said to understand thoroughly, although he was not a military man. Old Marshal de Noailles used to speak of him contemptuously as the General of the Flour-bags; but Marshal Saxe informed Madame, one day, that Du Verney knew more about war than this old general. Du Verney came one day to Madame de Pompadour's, where he met the king, the minister of war, and two marshals, and gave the plan of a campaign, which was

* The richest was the fourth, Paris Montmartel, the court banker, who left an immense fortune, which was dissipated by his son, the extravagant Marquis de Brunoy.

generally applauded. It was he who procured the appointment of the Duke de Richelieu to the army in the place of Marshal d'Estrées."

If Du Verney was indeed the promoter of this appointment, there is no need to compliment him upon it, for Richelieu only signalized himself by his pillage in Hanover, and brought to a disastrous termination the campaign which had been commenced so brilliantly by the victory of Hastenbeck, due to Marshal d'Estrées. But the influence of Du Verney on Madame de Pompadour had sometimes more fortunate results. Desirous of connecting his name with a useful institution, he induced the king's mistress to give her support to the project of a military school for the education of young officers. Du Verney's plan raised a great outcry. Madame de Pompadour was, however, decided, and, thanks to her, the military school was founded by an edict of January, 1751; so that our young sub-lieutenants, without perhaps being aware of it, are indebted for the school which preceded and produced the present Ecole Militaire to the alliance of a court beauty and an old financier.

Appointed director of the school, with the title of *intendant*, Du Verney began first of all to build the vast edifice which exists at present in the Champ de Mars. While this edifice was being constructed, the disasters of the seven years' war had diminished in a notable manner the influence of Madame de Pompadour; and the Ecole Militaire, being considered as a work of hers, was on that account looked upon with an unfavorable eye by the royal family and by the ministers themselves. In 1760, at the end of nine years, the building was still unfinished; a certain number of young men had been collected there, but the institution was failing for want of support. This state of things was the despair of old Du Verney, who had centred all his pride in this establishment, and whose active, restless, imperious disposition is sufficiently represented in this *quatrain*, which was published after his death:

"Here lies a worthy citizen, whose joy
Lay in tormenting all in his employ.
May God accord him—now he's in the grave—
That rest he living neither took nor gave."

Du Verney was constantly then at court, laboring without cessation on behalf of the military school, and soliciting the king in vain to visit it in state, which would have given a sort of *prestige*. Coldly received by the dauphin, the queen, and the princesses, he could not, as the friend of Madame de Pompadour, obtain from the nonchalance of Louis XV. the visit which he so much desired, when the idea struck him, in his despair, of having recourse to the young harpist, who appeared to be so assiduous in his attendance on the princesses, and who directed their concert every week. Beaumarchais understood at once the advantage he might derive from rendering an important service to a clever, rich old financier, who had still a number of affairs in hand, and who was capable of bringing him both wealth and advancement. But how could a musician without importance hope to obtain from the king what had already been refused to solicitations of much more influence than his own? Beaumarchais went to work like a man who had a genius for dramatic intrigue and a knowledge of the human heart.

We have shown that, while he was giving his time and attention to the princesses, he never asked for any thing in return. He thought that if he was fortunate enough to persuade them, in the first instance, to pay a visit to the Ecole Militaire, the curiosity of the king would perhaps be excited by the narrative of what they had seen, and would lead him to do that which he would never have been prompted to do by justice. He accordingly represented to the princesses not only the equitable side of the question, but also the immense interest which he himself had in obtaining this favor for a man who might be of great use to him. The princesses consented to visit the Ecole Militaire, and Beaumarchais was granted the honor of accompanying them. The director received them with great splendor; they did not conceal from him the great interest they took in their young *protégé*, and some days afterward Louis XV., urged by his daughters, visited it himself, and thus gratified the wishes of old Du Verney.*

* La Harpe and Gudin represent this service as having been rendered by Beaumarchais to Du Verney in consequence of a previous intimacy. This is an error; the intimacy grew out of the service itself.

From this moment the financier—grateful for Beaumarchais' good services, and delighted to find a person who could assist him as an intermediary in his intercourse with the court, resolved to make the young man's fortune. He began by giving him a share in one of his speculations to the amount of 60,000 francs, on which he paid him interest at the rate of ten per cent.; after this he gave him an interest in various other affairs. "He initiated me," says Beaumarchais, "into the secrets of finance, of which, as every one knows, he was a consummate master. I commenced making my fortune under his direction; by his advice I undertook several speculations, in some of which he assisted me with his money or his name, in all with his advice." It was, in fact, under the influence of this able master that the son of Caron, the watchmaker, acquired that taste for speculation which never afterward forsook him, which contributed not a little to harass his existence, and which, joined to an equally ardent taste for the pleasures of the intellect and imagination, formed the peculiar features of his character.

Soon afterward, in order to get on more rapidly, he considered it necessary to acquire letters of nobility, by purchasing what was then called a *savonette à vilain*;* that is to say, the title of king's secretary. But there was at first an obstacle in the way of this: old M. Caron continued his trade of watch-making, which was enough to compromise the success of the candidate. A letter from Beaumarchais to his father proves that even at that time he did not deceive himself as to the moral value of this kind of ennoblement.

"If I were at liberty," he writes to his father, "to say what new year's gift I should like to receive from you, I should wish, above all, that you would remember your promise of such long standing, to

This is proved by the following passage from one of Beaumarchais' unpublished letters: "In 1760, M. du Verney, in despair at having for nine years tried every means to induce the royal family to pay a visit to the Military School, which was looked upon as the work of Madame de Pompadour, wished to make my acquaintance; he offered me his friendship, assistance, and influence, if I had enough influence myself to succeed in doing that which every one else had been attempting in vain for nine years."

* Literally, *soap for the snob*.—TRANS.

change the inscription above your shop-front. An affair which I am about to conclude will probably be met by this difficulty alone, that you are in trade—a fact of which you inform the public in an announcement which admits of no reply. I can not think that you will refuse me a favor which can make no difference to you, and which will make a great difference in my prospects, owing to the foolish manner in which matters are viewed in this country. Not being able to alter the prejudice, I am obliged to submit to it, as there is no other channel open to the advancement which I desire for our happiness, and for that of all the family. I have the honor to be, with the most profound respect, Monsieur and honored father,

“Your very humble, &c.,

DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

“Versailles, January 2, 1761.”

Old M. Caron decided to give up watchmaking altogether, so as not to interfere with the career of his son, and the patent of king's secretary was obtained by Beaumarchais on the 8th of December, 1761. This new position contributed not a little to increase the number of his enemies; and the jealous feelings which were excited by his rapid fortune soon exhibited itself, from an occurrence which was the great misfortune of this first period of his life.

One of the grand-rangerships of the rivers and forests became vacant by the death of the holder. The grand-rangerships of the rivers and forests were divided into eighteen departments for the whole of France. The place was important, lucrative, and cost 500,000 livres.

Du Verney, who was becoming more and more attached to his young friend, lent him the sum necessary to buy it, promising to provide him with the means of repaying the money by contracts for the army, the *bouteille de l'encre* of the ancient régime. The money was deposited with a notary: it only remained necessary to obtain the consent of the king: if Beaumarchais had obtained it, the course of his life would probably have been changed, and already the princesses had the assurance of the controller-general that the desired assent would be given. Their *protégé* thought he was sure of success, but he had reckoned without his enemies.

On hearing that the watchmaker was about to become their colleague, some of the grand-masters of the waters and forests became indignant, and appealed to the others; a collective pe-

tion was addressed to the controller-general, in which these gentlemen threatened to resign. I will, in the first place, give the note presented by the princesses in Beaumarchais' name to the king, which at once puts us in possession of the facts of the case :

" TO THE KING.

" Beaumarchais, grandson of an engineer, nephew on the father's side of a captain of grenadiers, who died a chevalier of St. Louis, for the last seven years controller of the king's household, requests his majesty's permission to hold the office of grand-master of the waters and forests, which he has purchased for 500,000 francs on the promise of the controller-general, given to Mesdames (the princesses) that he should have this place when he or his father had obtained the appointment of king's secretary. He himself obtained that appointment : he is ready to give the appointment up to his father, if required. There is no personal objection to be made to him, but exception is taken to his father as carrying on the trade of watch-maker, who left it altogether six years since : * it is, moreover, said that he was unable to get accepted as his majesty's major-domo. To that Beaumarchais replies that several of the present grand-masters, and many of those who have retired, are of lower origin and extraction than himself : he appears as king's secretary, and consequently as a noble : if he was not accepted as his majesty's major-domo, it was in consequence of a new regulation which requires the applicant to be noble, and at that time he had not been appointed king's secretary.

" The opposition of some of the grand-masters, who assume to speak in the name of the *corps* (and whose hatred probably arises from envy) ought to give way before the promise of the controller-general, the intervention of Mesdames, and the consideration that a refusal brings dishonor and ruin to an honest man."

M. de la Chataigneraie, the queen's equerry, also wrote to Paris du Verney, in the name of the princesses, to urge him to use his influence with the controller-general in favor of Beaumarchais. Du Verney's answer, which was addressed directly to the princesses in the form of a memorandum, will give an idea of the activity of the struggle and the interest with which the young candidate inspired the princesses :

* This statement, which was written in 1762, is contradicted by the preceding letter of January, 1761. It was only a year since old M. Caron had quite given up trade ; but a petitioner is not required to be minutely accurate.

"MEMORANDUM FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 1762, FOR MESDAMES DE
FRANCE.

"Du Verney has been unable to see M. Bertin,* who has gone to Versailles to-day without giving an answer to the request which had been made for an interview, but he has seen M. de Beaumont,† and has made the strongest representations to him on the subject of the injustice which it is contemplated to inflict on M. de Beaumarchais. He has convinced him that they can not avoid receiving the young man. M. de Beaumont told him that M. de Bertin, when he left him, intended speaking to the king about the matter, but that he had not made up his mind either against or in favor of the young man. Du Verney thinks that if M. Bertin predisposes the king not to give his consent, it will be difficult to avoid the consequences: he thinks that Mesdames should see the minister before the conversation, and ask him to do one of two things: either to set the matter before the king in an advantageous manner, so that he may be ordered to proceed in spite of the unjust objection of the grand-masters, or not to speak of it as yet, so that Du Verney may have time to have a conversation with him on his return, similar to that which he has held with M. de Beaumont. However, if Mesdames have given the memorial to the king, and intimated to him that they were interested in its success, and that all honest persons hope the unfortunate young man will not be the victim of envy and calumny, Du Verney thinks the controller-general can have no reason for wishing to ruin M. de Beaumarchais, and a thousand for serving him, since Mesdames honor him with their protection. Du Verney entreats Mesdames to be kind enough to let him know what has been done, that he may act accordingly."

The portrait which Du Verney gives us elsewhere of young Beaumarchais is one which rather clashes with the notion that is generally formed of the author of the "Marriage of Figaro." "Since I have known him," he writes to the minister, "and he has been intimate with me, every thing has shown that he is an upright young man, whose noble mind, excellent heart, and polished wit merit the love and esteem of all honest persons; with the experience of misfortune, and the teachings of the opposition he has met with, he will owe his advancement, if he obtain it, to his good qualities alone."

Beaumarchais, in his turn, after exhausting every mode of

* Controller-general of the Finances.

† M. Moreau de Beaumont, Intendant of the Finances, under whose jurisdiction were the waters and forests.

application, defends himself against the persecution of the grand-masters in a sufficiently comic style ; since, instead of proving that he himself is noble, he now confines himself to proving that his adversaries are not so.

"Neither my inclination," he writes to the minister, "nor my principles allow me to play the odious part of informer, still less to attempt to vilify persons whose associate I am anxious to become ; but I think that, without offending delicacy, I may use the same arms against my adversaries with which they are endeavoring to overcome me.

"The grand-masters have never allowed their memorial to be communicated, which is not fair fighting, and proves that they are afraid I may answer them with advantage ; but I am told their objection is that my father was an artist, and that, however celebrated a man may be in his art, such a condition is incompatible with the honors of the grand-rangiership.

"In reply, I will pass in review the family and previous position of several of the grand-masters, about whom very accurate particulars have been supplied to me.

"1. The name of M. d'Arbonnes, grand-master of Orleans, and one of my warmest antagonists, is Hervé, and he is the son of Hervé the *hairdresser*. I can mention ten living persons to whom this Hervé has sold wigs, and placed them on their heads ; I am told, in answer to this, that Hervé was a dealer in hair. What a distinction ! It is ridiculous in the spirit, and false in the letter ; for no one can sell hair in Paris without being received as a hairdresser, or otherwise must sell it surreptitiously : but he was a hairdresser. However, Hervé d'Arbonnes was received as a grand-master *without opposition*, although during his youth he had perhaps followed his father's failing for the profession in question.

"2. The name of M. de Marizy, who was appointed grand-master of Burgundy five or six years since, is Legrand, and he is the son of Legrand the *wool-winder* in the Faubourg St. Marceau, who afterward built a little shop for the sale of blankets, near the market of St. Laurent, where he made some money. His son married the daughter of La Fontaine-Sellier, took the name of Marizy, and was received as grand-master *without opposition*.

"3. M. Tellès, grand-master of Châlons, is the son of a Jew named Tellès-Dacosta, who was originally a second-hand jeweler, and who afterward made his fortune through MM. Paris. He was received *without opposition*, and afterward excluded, as I am told, from the assemblies, because he resumed his father's trade, about which matter I know nothing.

"4. M. Duvaucel, grand-master of Paris, is the son of a Duvaucel who was the son of a button-maker; he was afterward shopman at his brother's in the little Rue aux Fers, then a partner in his brother's business, and finally master of the shop. M. Duvaucel met with *no obstacle to his reception.*"

Beaumarchais, as may be seen, had to contend with aristocrats whose genealogy was not more formidable than his own, but who, for that very reason, were only the more inveterate against a candidate whom they could not forgive, either for his youth, his rapid advancement, his wit, or his success in society. In spite of his efforts, in spite of the patronage of the princesses, and the support of Paris du Verney, he could not succeed in overcoming the open opposition of the grand-masters; the minister sided with them, and the consent of the king was not given. This painful check at the commencement of an administrative career which might have been brilliant, went to Beaumarchais' heart; the obstacles which proceeded from his humble origin became more and more numerous, and it is not astonishing that his genius exhibited a democratic and subversive tone up to the period of the Revolution. However, the true aristocracy were less hostile to him than the counterfeit patricians, who were taking possession of every thing in the latter days of the ancient *régime*. The circumstance which proves that personal antipathy was the only motive of the opposition of the grand-masters, and that no important reason rendered Beaumarchais unworthy of taking his place among them, is, that some months afterward he was able to purchase, receive, and perform the duties of an office, which was much less lucrative, it is true, than the other one, but far more aristocratic than the former one; an office which invested him with judicial functions, and which gave him precedence over persons of a much loftier birth than himself. To console and avenge himself for not having been able to procure admittance into the order of the grand-rangers of the waters and forests, he purchased the office of *Lieutenant-general of the Preserves in the Bailiwick, and Captainry of the Warren of the Louvre*: his nomination was presented for the king's consent by the Duke de La Vallière,* captain-general of the preserves, whose chief

* Grand-nephew of the celebrated duchess of that name.

officer Beaumarchais now became, having beneath him the Count of Rochecouart and the Count of Marcouville, who were merely lieutenants of the preserves. Now it is evident that if at this period there had been any thing serious to allege against the honor of Beaumarchais, the three persons whom I have just named would never have accepted him without opposition; one as his representative, the other two as their superior, in the performance of functions of a judicial character—for such was the nature of the semi-feudal office which Beaumarchais held, and which he filled with the most scrupulous care for a period of twenty-two years.

We may here explain briefly in what this office consisted, in the exercise of which it is difficult to imagine the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" without a laugh. Captainry was the name given to a district over which the king reserved the exclusive right of sporting. The one which bore the name of the Warren of the Louvre extended to a radius of twelve or fifteen leagues round Paris. In order to maintain the exclusive right of the king, and to decide upon all cases in which it appeared to be infringed upon, there was a special tribunal—the Tribunal of the Warren of the Louvre—called the "Tribunal for the Conservation of *the King's Pleasures*," which arraigned and punished, on the accusation of the officers and keepers of the Captainry, every individual who acted in contravention of the decrees destined to guard the royal privilege. These decrees were very numerous, and very vexatious to the landowner, who could neither kill the game, nor construct a new paling, nor make any alterations in his ground without obtaining an authorization to do so. Accordingly, the suppression of the Captainries in 1789 was one of the most popular measures passed by the Constituent Assembly. The tribunal in question held its sittings at the Louvre, and was presided over by the Duke de la Vallière, captain-general, or, in his absence—that is to say, almost always—by Lieutenant-general Beaumarchais, who came there every week, and sat down in a long robe on the *fleurs de lis* to judge gravely, not "*les pâles humains*," but "*les pâles lapins*." The fact is that he condemned "pallid men" to fine or imprisonment quickly enough, only it was about some question of rabbits that he did so.

The following is an extract from one of the numerous sentences which Beaumarchais passed every week, and which were posted up throughout the district of the Captainry. The reader may wish to see the multiform individual who is the subject of this work in the somewhat novel character of a serious Bridgson.*

“On the part of the King, and Monseigneur the Duke de la Vallière, Peer and Grand-falconer of France, &c., or his Lieutenant-general;

SENTENCE,

Which condemns the said Ragondet, farmer, to a fine of one hundred livres for not having conformed to the terms of Article 24 of the royal decree of 1669, and to pull down the shed and outer walls mentioned in the report of the 24th of the present month of July.”

The judgment concludes as follows:

“Done and given by *Messire* Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Equerry and King’s Counselor, Lieutenant-general of the Bailiwick, and Captainry of the Warren of the Louvre, and of the Grand Venerie of France, holding his sittings in the audience chamber, situate in the chateau of the Louvre, this Thursday, the 31st July, 1766.

“Collated: DEBRET. Signed: DEVITRY, Registrar-in-Chief.”

In 1773, after having exercised these superb functions for ten years, *Messire* Caron de Beaumarchais happened to get sent by a *lettre de cachet* to For-l’-Evêque, whereupon it was determined to dispute his title to the lieutenant-generalship. He at once, from the depth of his prison, asserted his claim in a letter to the Duke de la Vallière, in which he evinces all the pride and haughtiness of a baron of the Middle Ages.

“Monsieur le Duc,—Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, Lieutenant-general at the seat of your Captainry, has the honor to represent to you that, as his detention by order of the king does not deprive him of his functions in the state, he has been much surprised to learn that, without attending to the order concerning the Captainry dated May 17, 1754, which sets forth that every officer who does not produce a valid excuse for not finding himself at the reception of a

* Some of our readers may be unaware that *Bridgson* is the judge who appears in the “Marriage of Figaro;” a species of *Dogberry*, suggested, as far at least as regards the name, by the *Bridgson* (Justice Bridlegoose) of Rabelais.—TRANS.

new officer, shall be deprived of his *droit de bougies*,* the registrar of the Captainry has not only made a distribution of bougies, in which all mention of the name and *droit de bougies* of your petitioner were suppressed by the most culpable infringement of the said order—since there can be no more valid excuse for being absent from the tribunal on a reception day than that of having had the misfortune to be arrested by order of the king—but has even made over to another officer the right to distribute and sign orders for the delivery of the said bougies, which from all time have belonged to the lieutenant-general of your seat.

“The punctuality and zeal with which your petitioner has always fulfilled the duties of his office up to the present time make him hope, M. le Duc, that you will be pleased to maintain him in all the privileges of the said office, against every attempt which may be made to his disadvantage. When M. de Schomberg was at the Bastille, the king thought that he should continue his duties in connection with the Swiss whom he had the honor to command. The same thing happened to M. le Duc du Maine.† Your petitioner is perhaps the least worthy of the officers of your captainry, but he has the honor to be the lieutenant-general, and you will certainly not disapprove, M. le Duc, of his endeavoring to prevent the highest office of your captainry from being lowered while in his hands, and his affairs from being interfered with by any other officer to his detriment.

“CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.”

Beaumarchais had been just able to support his imprisonment at For-l'Evêque. To him, a nobleman of recent origin, it was what the Bastille was to a Schomberg; but when, in 1785, by a most scandalous abuse of authority, he was imprisoned for five days in a house of correction, the pride of the lieutenant-general of the preserves was wounded, and he magnanimously resigned in the following letter to the Duke de Coigny, who had succeeded the Duke de la Vallière.

“Paris, March 22, 1785.

“Monsieur le Duc,—The insult which I have received, without deserving it, from a hand which I respect so deeply, that I can only grieve in silence until the most convincing proofs of my innocence be placed under the king's eyes; the insult, I say, which I have re-

* At the Tribunal of the Warren of the Louvre: this was the name given to a pecuniary allowance which was granted to every member who was present on certain official occasions.

† The reader sees that Messire Caron de Beaumarchais does not look for his precedents among plebeians. He must have Schombergs, and princes of the blood.

ceived, Monsieur le Duc, having struck me out of the society of men, I have sentenced myself to a perpetual imprisonment at home; and as you, Monsieur le Duc de Coigny, can not be affected in any way by so strange an event, I have the honor to beg that you will accept the resignation of my functions as your lieutenant-general. This change in my position will in no way alter the respectful attachment with which I am, Monsieur le Duc, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Four years after this last letter there existed neither captainry nor tribunal of the warren of the Louvre, and "Monsieur, the *ex*-lieutenant-general," had become simply Citizen Beaumarchais.

A person who had lived within his jurisdiction, and who had retained a spite against him on account of some decision on behalf of the latter in favor of the "conservation of the royal pleasures," got an advocate to write a letter to him upon the subject, which was full of insults and threats, and to which the author of the "Marriage of Figaro" replied like a man who had completely cast off his judicial robes. It is quite in Beaumarchais' natural style.

"September 4, 1790.

"I have received the *very kind* letter of a gentleman who signs *Germain*, or *St. Germain*, and who calls himself the advocate of a M. Merle, on which I congratulate his client. When I was lieutenant-general of the tribunal for the conservation of the king's pleasures, I was condemned to hear all that had to be said by plaintiffs and defendants, and I acted according to my equity, my intelligence, and the text of the law, which I endeavored to soften as much as possible; but at the present time, when, *thank Heaven*, there are no preserves to protect, and no tribunals for protecting them, I am spared the annoyance of having to receive and reply to petitions. Accordingly I beg M. Germain, or St. Germain, the advocate, to aim his letters at objects by which my youth may yet profit.

"CARON-BEAUMARCHAIS."

It was in 1790 that Beaumarchais spoke with so much levity of his former functions as lieutenant-general of the preserves. At the period at which we have arrived, that is to say, in 1763, he little thought that the Revolution would abolish the feudal office of which, for a time, he had been so proud. He used to divide his time between the duties of this office, the functions of controller of the king's household, and of those

of king's secretary, without neglecting the three or four industrial enterprises in which he was engaged, and without forgetting his private pleasures, which he never did forget, nor his affection for his family, which throughout life occupied a large place in his thoughts. He had bought a pleasant house in the Rue de Condé, in which he installed his father and his younger sisters, who were unmarried, and where he used to pass all his leisure hours, when a letter from one of his sisters at Madrid determined him to set out for Spain.

CHAPTER V.

Beaumarchais and Clavijo.—Beaumarchais at Madrid.—A Breach of Promise of Marriage.—M. de Grimaldi.—Beaumarchais in the Commissariat.—Beaumarchais' Seguedillas.—Beaumarchais at the Card-table.—Beaumarchais and Voltaire.—The Spanish Drama.

BEAUMARCHAIS' affair with Clavijo in 1764 is sufficiently well known by the graphic narrative of the transaction which he himself published ten years afterward, in February, 1774, in his fourth memorial against Goëzman. It will suffice, therefore, here to verify the principal details of this narrative by means of the private correspondence I have before me.

It will be remembered that two of Beaumarchais' sisters, one of whom had married an architect, had gone to establish themselves at Madrid. A Spanish man of letters, named Joseph Clavijo, had fallen in love with the younger of the two sisters; promises of marriage had been exchanged; and this marriage was to be concluded as soon as the young man, who was without fortune, should obtain an appointment which he was soliciting. The appointment had been obtained and the banns published, when Clavijo suddenly refused to perform his promise, thus gravely injuring the domestic tranquillity as well as the reputation of Beaumarchais' sister. It was under these circumstances that the latter arrived in Madrid, where, by a combination of energy, coolness, and dexterity, he forced from Clavijo a declaration little honorable to himself, but offering a secure guarantee for the honor of Mademoiselle Caron.

Within a short time, the Spaniard, terrified at seeing himself exposed to the enmity of so resolute an adversary, solicited a reconciliation with his affianced bride. To this Beaumarchais consented to lend his aid; the reconciliation was satisfactorily effected, when, at the very moment that Beaumarchais thought the marriage was about to take place, he learned that Clavijo was secretly plotting against him, and that, by accusing him of being engaged in a conspiracy, he had obtained from the government an order for his arrest, and for his expulsion from Madrid. The irritated Beaumarchais hastened to the ministers, penetrated even to the presence of the king, justified himself completely, and revenged himself upon his treacherous foe by obtaining his dismissal from the post he held—that of keeper of the archives—and his ejection from the court.

Such, reduced to its simplest form, is the history of an episode in his life which Beaumarchais has been able to invest with the most lively attraction. When we read his Memorial, written ten years after the events narrated, we are naturally led to seek to verify its exactitude. In a short notice of Clavijo,* Beaumarchais is accused of calumniating the unfaithful lover of his sister, and of drawing a "hideous portrait" of him. It is very probable that, in order to excite more interest for himself, Beaumarchais may have, in some degree, overcharged his adversary's picture; but beyond the fact that it is an exaggeration to accuse him of having drawn a "hideous portrait,"† it is certain that the chief points of the narrative published in 1774 are in perfect harmony with the private correspondence of 1764. Thus the authenticity of Clavijo's first declaration, in which he avows "having broken

* Published in the "Biographie Universelle."

† This Joseph Clavijo, who afterward became a writer of distinction, was unlucky enough to have to exist for years after an event he had almost forgotten, stigmatized with the atrocious character drawn of him by Beaumarchais. During his own lifetime he saw himself gibbeted on the public stage by Göthe as a melo-dramatic villain; but villainy in love does not always injure a man; and that of Clavijo did not prevent him obtaining considerable success at Madrid, where he edited the "Historical and Political Mercury," translated Buffon into Spanish, and where he died in 1806, Vice-director of the Museum of Natural History.

a promise of honor without pretext and without excuse," and of which avowal his subsequent conduct much increases the gravity, is fully confirmed by the family documents. This confession of Clavijo's gave rise, indeed, to the following letter, written by old M. Caron to his son at Madrid, in which, beneath the outer casing of the old watchmaker, we find traces of the former dragoon :

"Paris, June 5, 1764.

"What delight it affords me, my dear Beaumarchais, to be blessed with a son whose actions so gloriously crown the end of my career! I can see at a glance how beneficial the generous action you have done will be to the honor of my dear Lisette. What a splendid marriage present for her, my friend, will be this same declaration of *Clavico's* !* If we may judge of the cause by the effect, he must have been terribly frightened. Assuredly, I myself would not, for the empire of Mahom, with that of Trebisonde into the bargain, have written and signed such a document; it covers you with glory and him with shame. By the same post I have received two letters from my charming countess (the Countess of Fuen-Clara), addressed to Julie and myself—so charming, so touching, so full of expressions of tenderness toward me, and of honorable mention of you, that I am sure you would participate in the pleasure I have experienced in their perusal. You have enchanted her. She seems never tired in rejoicing at knowing you—in longing to be of service to you, and so expressing her delight *that all the Spaniards approve of, and praise your behavior to Clavico*.† She could not be more delighted had she been enabled to call you entirely her own. I entreat you not to neglect her. Adieu, my dear Beaumarchais, my honor, my glory, my crown, the joy of my heart. Accept a thousand embraces from the tenderest of fathers and the best of friends. CARON."

This letter proves that Beaumarchais does not violate truth when in his Memorial against Goëzman he represents himself saying to Clavijo, "I am not about here to assume the part of one of those stage brothers who wish their sisters to be married." It was, indeed, not so much to force his sister upon

* At this time Mademoiselle Caron's marriage with another person was in contemplation.

† It is plain from this, that if, ten years afterward, Beaumarchais did paint himself in somewhat flattering colors, the testimony of the Countess of Fuen-Clara, a lady of advanced age, and enjoying great consideration, places it beyond doubt that his conduct had gained him many partisans in Spain.

Clavijo by, as it were, holding a pistol to his head, as to secure a safeguard for her reputation, with a view to her eventual marriage with a Frenchman named Durand, who was established at Madrid. We are led to this conclusion by the following passage from a letter written by Beaumarchais, and dated the 15th of August, 1764, in which we find a corresponding justification of other assertions made in the Memorial published in 1774.

"I found my Spanish sister nearly married to Durand; for in the state of discredit into which the poor child, with her girlish notions, imagined herself to have fallen, the first honest man who offered himself was almost a divinity to her. My arrival having, in some measure, rectified her ideas, and on finding myself disposed, from my own personal views, and also from the advice of my ambassador, to prefer Clavijo, who I had every right to believe was thoroughly cured of his former aberrations—from all the means he employed to persuade me of the fact—I found it necessary to use, in the first instance, gentle means, in order to sever a bond which hope and habit had cemented on either side."

These details thoroughly harmonize with that part of the Memorial of 1774 in which Beaumarchais represents himself as having been seduced by Clavijo into becoming his advocate with his sister. In other letters he narrates the Spaniard's underhand proceedings, his duplicity, and the vengeance he at length, though with considerable hesitation, inflicted on him.

"This coxcomb Clavijo," he writes, "boasted that he had not yet lost his appointment, and that he was all the while drawing his salary secretly. He talked about it too openly and too often. I heard of it in my turn, and my pity immediately changed into indignation. His post is given away. It now only remains to him either to turn capuchin or to leave the country. He is completely crushed; yet even now my sentiments of pity toward him return; but this time, alas! they must be fruitless."

A journal of the whole of these transactions had been kept at the actual time of their occurrence by Beaumarchais; this journal, which served as a basis for the narrative published by him ten years afterward, is not to be found among his papers, but its existence is confirmed by many passages in his correspondence, and especially so by this note, written in 1764 to M. Caron, senior, by an abbé to whom the contents of the journal in question had been communicated.

"I have read and re-read, sir, the account sent you from Madrid. I am overjoyed at all it contains; your son appears in the light of a true hero. I am happy to recognize in him the wittiest of men, the tenderest of brothers; honor, firmness—each quality shines in his proceedings with Clavico. It will delight me to see the issue of an affair which interests me so much. I am exceedingly grateful for your attention; the only claim I have to it lies in the sentiments of esteem and friendship which I entertain for you, and for the whole of your respectable and amiable family, and with which I have the honor to be, &c., &c.,

THE ABBÉ DE MALESPINE.

"June 3, 1764."

Thus it was no romance, as has been sometimes said, but a true story, which inspired the author of the Memorials against Goëzman to write perhaps the best pages that ever proceeded from his pen, and it was, indeed, fortunate for him to be provoked by an anonymous letter vilifying and calumniating his conduct at Madrid into thus admitting the public to his confidence.

So much for the Clavijo adventure; but this adventure only occupied a month. Commenced at the end of May, 1764, it was spoken of no more at the end of June, and Beaumarchais remained more than a year at Madrid: he only left that city at the end of March, 1765. What was he doing there? We shall soon learn from his correspondence, and he will there appear in his own proper character, with all the vivacity and variety of his nature.

He had left Paris in order to avenge his sister; but he was not a man to travel so far for a single object; his intentions were not only to transact business, but a great deal of business. From this point of view, Spain, in 1764, presented a new and attractive field of enterprise for imaginative speculators such as Beaumarchais essentially was. He arrived with a head full of projects, and a pocket furnished with 200,000 francs in notes payable to the bearer, which had been intrusted to him by Du Verney (though it must be added that the latter had forbidden him to make use of them without his express authority), and which had been given to him to enable him to assume an influential standing with the Spanish ministry. He brought with him, too, numerous letters of recommendation from the court to the ambassador of France; and he had scarcely arrived be-

fore he was launched into that vortex of industrial enterprises, of pleasures, of fêtes, of gallantries, of music, of songs, that seems always to have been his element. In the flower of his youth, in the thirty-second year of his age, all his wit, all his imagination, all his gayety, all his enthusiasm, all his faculties, in a word, were at their acmé of development. We have here the Almaviva and the Figaro of the "Barber of Seville" blended together, with a touch of Sir Charles Grandison, and, withal, some shades of character that remind us of the most celebrated speculators of our own times.

"I pursue my business transactions," he writes to his father, "with the obstinacy you know me to possess; but in all matters between Frenchman and Spaniard I find success very hard; I shall have some fine details to give you when I come back to warm myself at your fireside.

"I work, I write, I confer, I draw up, I represent, I defend, I oppose: such is my life. The Marquis Grimaldi, the most gallant gentleman that was ever at the head of a ministry, is my passion; his manners so frank, so noble, that I can not help being enchanted with them. Pray keep what information I send you within the bounds of a very narrow circle; do not let it pass beyond the walls of your little retreat. It appears that they are rather pleased here with the manner in which I have been able to throw a light on some somewhat thorny questions;* and I can venture at least to promise you that if I do not succeed in every thing I undertake, I shall at least carry away with me from this country the esteem of all with whom I have had to do. Take care of your health, and believe me that my greatest happiness will consist in sharing with you whatever good fortune I may meet with."

In another place Beaumarchais writes:

"I am in the prime of life. My genius will never have greater vigor; it is my part to work, yours to rest. I shall, perhaps, succeed in enabling you to fulfill your engagements. I do not tell you all now, but, rely upon it, I do not forget the project which I have thought of so long, that of placing you on an equality with all who surround you; only live carefully, my dear father; do not neglect yourself. The time will come when you will enjoy your old age as you deserve, free from debt, and in the society of your loving children. I am getting your son-in-law appointed paid engineer to the king.

* *Assez content du jour que j'ai répandu sur quelques questions épineuses.*

He has become very steady, and works like a horse ; I urge him on with the spur of ambition, but he goes well enough of his own accord. If you received any news of me from an inhabitant of Madrid, you would be told that your son was amusing himself here like a king ; he spends all his evenings at the house of the Russian ambassador, or at Lady Rochford's ; he dines four times a week with the commander of the engineers, and drives in a coach drawn by six mules about the environs of Madrid ; then he goes to the *sitio real* to see M. de Grimaldi and the other ministers. He takes one of his meals every day at the French ambassador's, so that these visits are not only charming, but also put him to very little expense. All this relates to amusement ; but your friends must not conclude that I am neglecting my own business, for no one has ever attended to that but myself. It is in good society, for which I was born, that I find my resources, and when you see the productions of my pen you will perceive that I have not walked, but run toward my object."

What, then, were the works which came from Beaumarchais' pen at Madrid ? First of all there was a voluminous paper on the concession of the exclusive right to trade with Louisiana to a French company organized on the principle of the India Company, and about which Beaumarchais was memorializing the Spanish ministry. After this came a plan, in virtue of which he asks for the right of supplying all the Spanish colonies with negroes. The idea is singular enough as coming from the author of the little poem against optimism, already alluded to, which contains a vehement denunciation of slavery, and which was written only a year before Beaumarchais' visit to Madrid. It appears that his speculations were not arranged on the same principles as his philosophy.*

* Two years afterward, in 1766, Beaumarchais, who had already forgotten his project for supplying the Spanish colonies with negroes, wrote a letter to the head of the administrative department of the navy in favor of a mulatto, commencing as follows : " A poor fellow named Ambroise Lucas, whose only crime consists in having a complexion almost as dark as that of the majority of the free inhabitants of Andalusia, with brown hair which curls naturally, large black eyes, and very beautiful teeth, all which is very pardonable, has been put in prison on the requisition of a man who happens to be a little whiter, named M. Chaillou, who had about the same right over the man with the dark complexion which the Ishmaelite dealers acquired over little Joseph, when they purchased him from persons who had no right to sell him ; but our religion has sublime principles, which harmonize admirably with the colonial system."

The third project which the distinguished traveler prepared at Madrid, between a concert and a dinner, was one for the colonization of the Sierra Morena; this was followed by different other papers on the advancement of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce in Spain, and, finally, a new plan for supplying the Spanish troops with provisions. As this last scheme was much nearer being executed than any of the others, we will leave him to discuss it in his own manner, in an unpublished letter to his father, which is very long, and from which I make long quotations, because in its great diversity it is a living portrait of this speculator, philosopher, and artist, called Beaumarchais.

" Madrid, Jan. 28, 1765.

" Monsieur and dearest Father,—I have received your letter of Jan. 15, in which you express your astonishment at the manner in which your friends received your communication.* But what appears to have struck you with surprise would have seemed to me a natural thing enough. To preserve a good opinion of ourselves, it is only necessary to neglect no portion of what we undertake : to gain the good opinion of others, it is necessary to succeed. Success is the only recognized test of the ability of those who speculate. Therefore, if I had been able to stop the words on your lips, I certainly should have objected as much as possible to your communicating my secrets to any one. My plans may be the wisest possible ; I might exhibit all the talent and skill imaginable for conducting so important an affair to a happy issue. If some unforeseen event caused my bark to founder even in the harbor, I should expect nothing but a bitter smile from those who would have exalted me to the clouds if I had been favored by fortune. However, my dear father, you know me. The most comprehensive and lofty projects are no strangers to my mind. It conceives and comprehends with much facility that which would at once check ordinary and indolent minds. I told you the other day that I had just signed the preliminaries ; I am now much more advanced. The hydra of seven heads was a trifle compared with the one of a hundred heads which I have undertaken to overcome. But, at all events, I have now managed to make myself absolute master of the enterprise for supplying *the entire provisions for the whole of the troops of Spain, Majorca, and the garrisons on the coast of Africa* ; and those of all persons living at the king's ex-

* The father, who had already heard of the project, and who had been asked by his son to keep it a secret, had spoken of it in confidence to some friends who appeared to have doubts of its success.

pense. Our friend is right in saying that it is the greatest affair in the country. It amounts to more than twenty millions a year. My company is organized, my officials are appointed. I have four cargoes of corn on the voyage, both from New England and from the south, and if I can untie the last knot, I shall commence altogether on the 1st of March. The persons who are at present engaged in the affair understand nothing about it, and lost horribly last year: first, because corn was almost beyond price in Spain, while they had not a single correspondent abroad; secondly, because they had undertaken the contract at too small a sum. I have put them out of court by different means, the combination of which was very difficult: finally, I have succeeded in introducing a spirit of conciliation and peace between the partners, in place of an animosity which was as ruinous to them as their mode of conducting business. They are quite out of the matter. What I have to do now is to get my own conditions accepted by the minister, who invites me to open the ball, but finds the music rather dear. I can diminish nothing in my just demands If my conditions be accepted, I engage to pay the king back about 4,000,000 of reals which he had previously advanced on the affair; provided always his majesty consents to wait for the money until the last year of the contract. One of the most positive articles of the agreement is the payment, which is assured to me on the 13th of every month, of 1,800,000 reals, which I am to receive from the royal treasury. The two partners who give the affair up to me owe 5,000,000 reals to different individuals; the bills are due, and they can not pay. I have arranged every thing, so that on the day of signing the treaty I shall hand them over the 5,000,000 in their own paper; and the person who holds them has made a private arrangement with me that these 5,000,000 will not be charged to me until the end of my contract, and that the day I sign it he is to send me 3,000,000 to commence with. For this I am to give him a third of the profits There is some idea of joining to this a contract for supplying white bread to all the towns in Spain, which would double the importance of my enterprise; but I mean to commence by giving them a great opinion of my mode of working, so that, by inspiring confidence, I may gain advantages which it is difficult for a beginner to obtain. I foresee that there are other things to be connected with the above which will make the affair almost unlimited. But I must say, like the honest Spaniards, *poco à poco*. We must get into the saddle before galloping away; above all, we must be firm in the stirrups. It is nine in the evening; I am going out to converse about business. If I come back before eleven, I shall write you a few lines more.

"I come back; nothing is changed. I have signed the celebrated

agreement which entitles me to treat in my own name with the Marquis D'Esquilace, Minister of War and Finance. Every one in Madrid is speaking of the affair. I am complimented upon it as if it were a settled thing. I, who know it is not yet terminated, hold my tongue for the present.

"Good-night, dear father; believe me, you must be astonished at nothing; neither at my success, nor at the contrary, if it happens to me. There are altogether ten reasons in my favor, and a hundred against me. As to my age, I have just reached a point at which the vigor of the body, united with that of the mind, constitute the prime of life. I shall soon be thirty-three. I was in a shop-window at twenty-four. I have made up my mind that the twenty succeeding years, which will bring me to my forty-fifth year, shall, after my long labors, produce that pleasant tranquillity which I think can only be appreciated when looked upon as a reward for the troubles of youth. In the mean while, I laugh; my inexhaustible good-humor does not leave me for a moment. I have been to some delightful suppers here. I might send you some verses, composed by your servant, on Spanish seguedillas, which are very pretty vaudevilles, the words, however, of which are generally worthless. The people say here, as in Italy, the words are nothing, the music is every thing.

"I got in a passion when I heard such an absurdity. I chose the most popular air, a soft, touching, charming melody, and wrote words to it in an analogous strain. When they were heard, my opinion was admitted to be the correct one, and I was overwhelmed with requests for words. But one moment, gentlemen; I must not let the amusements of the evening interfere with the work of the morning. Accordingly, I continue to write and think about business all day, and in the evening give myself up to the pleasures of a society equally illustrious and well chosen. My last seguedilla has been exceedingly fortunate, and is in the hands of every one who speaks French at Madrid. In truth, I laugh on my pillow when I think how strangely the affairs of this world are linked together, by what numerous and always out-of-the-way roads fortune is attained, and how, above all, the mind which is superior to circumstances can always find pleasure for itself in the midst of these whirlpools of business affairs, pleasures, conflicting interests, sorrows, and hopes, which meet, clash, and fall powerless before it. . . .

"My dear Boisgarnier, this pretty seguedilla, and the accompaniment for the guitar, which I have composed (in a country where every one plays it, and yet can not accompany my seguedilla like myself, who, out of compliment to the country, throw off something, from time to time, for their favorite instrument), you would sing away at it, until at last, perhaps, you would render it perfectly. You shall

have the air, then, and the accompaniment I promise you, if I have a moment to spare between now and the next post. But what should you say of me if I were to take it to you myself? Indeed, I am very near my departure: a word from the minister may start me off before the next fortnight.

"Good-night, my dear father; it is half-past eleven. I am going to take some *sirop de capillaire*, for during the last three days I have had a frightful cold in the head; but I wrap myself up in my Spanish cloak, with a good large hat, turned down over my forehead, which they call here being *en capa y sombrero*; when a man, throwing his cloak over his shoulder, conceals part of his face, they call that being *embassado*. I add this to my other precautions, and, in a carriage, carefully closed, go off to my business. I hope you continue to enjoy good health. In reading over this letter, which I send scribbled as it is, I have been obliged to make twenty erasures, to give it some sort of continuity. This will cure you of reading my letters to other persons, or making copies of them."

Beaumarchais' writing, indeed, exhibits all the rapidity of thought in this long letter, in which he passes from one subject to another with the most wonderful versatility—in one place calculations, and the other philosophical reflections, elsewhere sincerity and enthusiasm; such is this Protean man.

The following is another unpublished letter of his, in which he represents himself in the drawing-room of the Russian ambassador at Madrid, at a card-table, which is so spirited and lively that I have determined to give it entire. It is addressed to his sister Julie. Here we have Beaumarchais in another aspect.

"Madrid, Feb. 11, 1765.

"You will remember, dear Julie, that I promised you, in one of my last letters, the details of the persecution directed against me by the Russian ambassador, which I have put a stop to, as I ought; here they are; they will give you an idea of my life at Madrid—that is to say, of my evenings—for I give up my entire day to business.

"For some time, the Count of Buturlin, the ambassador in question, who is son of the Grand-marshal of Russia, had been receiving me at his house with a predilection which caused it to be said that he and the very pretty embassadress were in love with me. In the evening they had cards or music, and supper, on which occasions I was the soul of the entertainment. The party was increased by all the ambassadors, who, before this time, had not seen much of one another. Since the return of the court to this town, their suppers

had been charming, they said, because I was present at them ; I had one evening won at *brehan*, although we were not playing high, 500 livres from the count, and 1500 from the countess ; from that time we have played no more at *brehan* ; and I was asked to play at *faro*, which nothing in the world would induce me to do. I had not been paid my 2000 livres, but said nothing about it—every one knew of it—it was considered that I was behaving like an ambassador, and the count like a somewhat mean private individual. At last, one evening, annoyed that the count, although he had just gained 100 louis, did not speak of what he owed me, I said aloud, ‘ If the count will lend me some gold, I will commit an act of folly, and play you at *faro*.’ He could not avoid doing so, and passed me the 100 louis which he had just gained. I held the bank, but in an hour my poor bank was broken ; the Duke of San-Blas gained fifty louis of me ; the English ambassador fifteen ; the Russian twenty, &c. I was almost in the same position as if I had won nothing : I got up with a laugh and said, ‘ My dear count, we are quits !’ ‘ Yes,’ said he, ‘ but you will not say in future that you do not play at *faro*, and we hope you will henceforth join the rest of the company.’ ‘ Willingly, if there are only a few louis to stake ; but not to hold banks of a hundred.’ ‘ That one,’ said he, ‘ has not lost you much.’ ‘ That is all that could be said,’ I replied, ‘ if my debt had been a bad one ;’ hereupon the countess interrupted the conversation. Madame de la C.* rose and told me to give her my arm : I left. There were sulks for two days ; I went, nevertheless, to the Russian embassy as usual, and in order to seem not to have played a desperate game, lost every evening about ten or twelve louis, or perhaps won some of my stakes. One evening, when I had gained twenty louis on a bank of 200, I got up, and, before going away, put all my winnings on two cards, both of which gained ; I went on ; every thing succeeded ; I broke the bank, which was held by the Marquis de Carrasola ; the Chevalier de Guzman put a hundred four-louis pieces on the table, and said, ‘ Gentlemen, do not go away ; I wager that M. de Beaumarchais will break this new bank also.’ Having gained 200 louis, I considered myself obliged to reply to the invitation. I began playing ; every one stopped, as there was no one else who played so high. Putting fifty louis on one side, and intending to let the rest be won back, so that I might never have to play again, I put ten louis on each card ; when the card won, I doubled. To be short, in two hours I had a hundred four-louis pieces. I rose, and went off to bed with my five hundred louis, of which I lost 150 the following day. Madame de C. said that I had played very generously in allowing such

* This is the lady who sent the somewhat flippant message to old M. Caron, of which we have already spoken.

a large sum to be won back from me, and that I could keep the rest. I was going away, when the Russian ambassador, addressing me personally, said, 'Will you no longer try your strength with me?' 'I have lost a great deal this evening,' I replied. 'But,' he replied quickly, 'you gained a great deal more yesterday.' 'M. le Comte,' I said, 'you know whether I care about the money I win at cards. I played in spite of myself; I have gained in the face of reason, and you only press me in this way, because you know very well that I play without rules, and at a great disadvantage.' 'Parbleu!' he said; 'no one can play better than a man who wins, and a great deal of this money is mine.' 'Well, M. le Comte, how much did you lose?' 'One hundred and fifty louis,' he said. 'I shall lose, then,' I replied, '300 louis this evening; for, to the 150 which I have just given back to the bank, I will put 150 more against you, if you wish to play, so that all the advantage may be on your side; but I must stake twenty-five louis every time.' He took the cards, for this was just what he wanted. My luck continued; I won 200 louis, after which I rose and said, 'It would be folly on my part to play any longer: I should ruin you, sir; another day, luck may be against me, and you will get your money back.' 'What, sir, you are going? Par dieu! Win 500 louis of me, or let me win my money back.' 'No, M. le Comte, another time; it is four in the morning: a man may reasonably go to bed.' 'But, sir, you were more polite with the Chevalier de Guzman.' 'And, accordingly,' I replied, 'he lost his 500 louis. I am quite overcome by sleep. Will you have your 200 louis on a stake at *trente et quarante*?' 'No,' he said, 'at *faro*.' 'Gentlemen, I wish you good-night.' The countess, his wife, rather vexed at her husband's loss, let the observation fall that I was 'more fortunate than polite.' I looked at her fixedly, and said, 'Madame l'Ambasadrice, you forget that, a week ago, you paid me a compliment of quite an opposite nature.' She blushed. I added nothing, and left. It was the fact that the week previously, when supping at Lord Rochford's, she had begged me, with clasped hands, to lend her thirty louis, to pay her losses with; and that I did so immediately, although I had lost, and remembered the affair of the *breelan*.

"The count, then, owes me 200 louis, and the countess 30, without reckoning the other 350 louis I had won; I swear my great oath not to play any more. I shall look on at the game for a few days longer, without mixing myself up in the affairs of great people. The ambassador looks at me like a dog, and does not speak to me; his wife appears embarrassed; not a word is said about payment, not an excuse is made for the delay. I complained to Madame de la C——, who the same evening took the ambassador's physician on one side, and then made a terrible attack upon his master, declaring to him

that if he did not behave differently toward me she would reproach him with it; and, finally, that he was an ill-bred, impertinent man.

"As my manner was always the same toward both husband and wife, every one was on my side. The next day the doctor brought me 200 louis to the house of Madame de la C——, where I was dining. She was very much offended, and sent word to the ambassador that she would see him in the evening, and give him the lesson he deserved; that he ought to have brought the money to my own house, and to have apologized for his sulkiness and delay. I thought it best to take the 200 louis, for which the doctor asked me to give him a receipt. I laughed in his face, and wrote the ambassador a letter, which was polite, but calculated to make him ashamed of himself. Two hours afterward the countess came to the house of Madame de la C——. I was no longer there. A grand explanation ensued. I did not set foot in the Russian embassy for a week. At last the countess sent the physician to me, to beg me to go and see her, and to complain of my absence. I replied that, in spite of the great privation I felt in no longer enjoying her society, I thought I ought not to make my appearance in a house where I had such good reason to be offended with the master.

"Madame de la C—— was appealed to; the count was said to be sorry and ashamed of his conduct; I keep to the etiquette of the matter, and finally the ambassador sent the Prince of Mezersky to me, to beg I would do him the honor to go in the evening to a concert and supper at his house. In the afternoon the count called to ask me if I wished to see the new piece in his box, saying that he was waiting to take me with him. I thought it better the interview should take place at his house, and replied that I was writing, but that I would have the honor to see him in the evening, according to his invitation. I arrived rather late on purpose, when the concert had commenced, and all the guests were present. I was surprised to find that I, who was previously looked upon as one of the family, and never announced, was now preceded by two pages, who ushered me into the concert-room with great ceremony. The countess was at the harpsichord. She advanced toward me, and said, as she presented the count to me, that friends ought never to quarrel about a misunderstanding, and that they both hoped I would remain a friend of theirs: immediately afterward she added—by way of sealing the reconciliation—M. de Beaumarchais, I have a desire to play the part of *Annette*; I hope you will accept that of *Lubin*. The Swedish envoy will be the *Lord*; Prince Mezersky the *Bailiff*;^{*} and we have already begun the rehearsals. It was impossible for me to avoid ac-

* The principal characters in Rousseau's "*Devin du Village*."

cepting this kind offer. I went to the harpsichord at once, the orchestra began, and I sang the music of Lubin. Each went through as much as he knew of his part, after which we had a grand concert and a grand supper: good-humor was restored. It is understood that I am to hear no more about card-playing, and that we are to amuse ourselves with pleasures which are more lively and will not tend to such grave results. The countess, quite delighted, sent a page to me during dessert with a note containing four lines in my praise, badly versified, it is true, but very flattering. She had composed them that very day. Here they are: *

‘O toi à qui la nature a donné pour partage
Le talent de charmer avec l’esprit du sage,
Si Orphée, comme toi, eût eu des sons si flatteurs,
Pluton sans condition aurait fait son bonheur.’*

“This was no ordinary honor, I assure you. I replied to the compliment. The intimacy is greater than ever; we have balls, concerts, but no more card-playing, and I have 14,500 livres left. I have since written French words to a new Spanish seguidilla. There are 200 copies of it; people are tearing it from one another’s hands. I must take care of it for you, with the music of the one I sent to your father. Good-night. I have fulfilled my promise as well as I could. You know as much now about the affair of the cards as myself. I shall write on Wednesday to my Pauline and her aunt. In spite of the preparations of Annette, I am afraid Lubin will be taken off before the piece is played. I may have to go in ten days.”

As conceit was the besetting sin of Beaumarchais, who compares himself elsewhere to Alcibiades, one is tempted to ask whether he did not exaggerate his familiarity with these ambassadors; but among the papers relating to Spanish affairs are found letters from the ambassador of England, Lord Rochford, which prove that the young and brilliant Frenchman was really the most popular man of the diplomatic corps in Madrid. His Parisian liveliness put all this somewhat formal world in movement; Lord Rochford is full of him; goes to the Prado with him; sups with him; sings duets with him; and becomes quite jovial for an English diplomatist. It was doubtless the card-playing scene which we have given that

*
Thou on whom bounteous nature has bestowed
The art of pleasing, with the sage’s mind,
If Orpheus had produced such sounds as thine,
Pluto, without conditions, would have freed him.

formed the foundation for the calumnies uttered at a later period, during the Goëzman lawsuits. In the anonymous letter which Beaumarchais publishes himself, and in which he is spoken of as an unfair player, not only did he play fairly, but I see, from all his letters, that he did not like play, and only consented to join in it under protest. At the period when he was living in great state in Paris, although his visitors played, he never played himself. In the midst of all these commercial speculations and aristocratic pleasures, the future author of the "Barber of Seville" appears to have been always occupied with the affairs of his humble family: at one time displaying much talent in forcing two or three ladies of noble family who were at Madrid to pay long-standing accounts of his father's for watches and jewels without compromising his own position; at another time taking with fraternal good nature an active part in all the little incidents of the lives of his sisters in Paris; or, again, quitting the saloons of the court for the modest residence of his sisters at Madrid.

"I saw Drouillet,"* he writes to his father, "on my arrival; he and his wife have paid me a visit; but I do not cultivate their society, although Drouillet is an estimable man, and as honest as the late Pichon, with a capital house at Madrid. The reason for my keeping away from them is the ridiculous airs and manners of his wife, who, because she has a few crowns more than your daughters, spoke of them as 'mesdemoiselles' before me, for which I had the honor to take her up. She was very desirous of getting me to her house, by all the attentions and invitations possible, but said nothing about my sisters, which made me say, in reply to all her politeness, that I had too short a time to remain at Madrid not to give up all my leisure to my family. It is every where the same, and the ridiculous is of no country. We have here what is called the great world and little world of France. My sisters, too well educated to belong to the little world, are not considered sufficiently rich for the great one. Accordingly, the visits of *la* Drouillet were for me alone; upon this your son took the liberty of putting her in her proper place, which makes her say that I am malicious.† You know, my dear father, whether that is the case, and whether there is any malice in looking at things as they really exist, and saying what I think of them."

The eldest son of Madame Guilbert was at school in Paris;

* A French banker residing at Madrid.

† The same accusation was afterward made by Madame Goëzman.

the child died; Beaumarchais, intrusted by his father to prepare his sister and brother-in-law for this sad news, replied by the following letter, which is evidently, it appears to me, the production of a man who is naturally good and full of delicate kindness.

"I have received your thick and mournful packet, which I have not yet entirely acted upon. I reserve this penance for my poor friends until their Lent. They have one son remaining, who is a very pretty child, as intelligent as possible, and who devours every thing which is given him to learn. The only preparation I have made for imparting the sad news which I have to announce to them has consisted in caressing Eugenio very much since the reception of your letter, for which they appear to be very grateful. I gave him a louis for the Carnival, and I am having a very handsome hus-sar's dress made for him. I spoke to them of his brother, and pointed out to them the difference which existed between their capabilities and talents, and from one point to another at last brought them to confess the difficulty they felt about putting the elder elsewhere than in the king's guards, while the latter is intended for the engineers. I think I have now prepared them sufficiently, and that at the beginning of Lent I can tell them the news without any farther hesitation."*

It appears that at this period he was already in correspondence with Voltaire, upon what subject I can not say. "I have received M. de Voltaire's letter," he writes to his father from Madrid; "he compliments me, playfully, on my thirty-two teeth, my lively philosophy, and my age.† His letter is very kind; but my letter made this answer so necessary, that I think I should have written it myself. He desires some details with regard to the country in which I am; but my best

* We may also quote a portion of Beaumarchais' private letter to his father, in which he exhibits a taste for peaceful and moderate pleasures, which is not generally attributed to him: "It would be a delightful thing for me to look forward to, from time to time, if I could think I was about to pass a month or two with persons as happy as they are dear to me. What a pleasure, at the end of all my labors, to bury the rest of my existence in the midst of my relations and friends, all delighted with one another, and all knowing the value of comfort, without display, and of what is called the happy medium!"

† I could not find this letter, dated 1764, in Voltaire's Correspondence, as afterward edited by Beaumarchais. He had probably lost it.

answer will be that which M. de Caro made yesterday to the Marchioness d'Arissa at M. de Grimaldi's. She had asked him what he thought of Spain. 'Madam,' replied he, 'wait until I have left it for my answer. I am too sincere and too polite to give it at the house of one of the king's ministers.'" Sometimes bad news reached Beaumarchais from France. He experienced losses; his plans at Madrid were not succeeding. He then writes as follows:

"I strengthen myself by work against calamity. As soon as I quit the oar, misfortunes and losses overwhelm me on all sides. The gayety of my disposition, and, I dare to add, while rendering thanks to Providence, the force of my mind, together with my frequent reverses, all combine to prevent me succumbing. When I have torn away an ounce of flesh from my lips on the past, I work seriously at the present, and can not help smiling at the future. I have already lost three or four times more than I possess in the world; unworthy enemies have intercepted my path. Poor Pichon is ruining me at St. Domingo; but here I am, nevertheless, shaking my square head, and recommencing cheerfully the work of the Danaïdes."

We should never finish if we tried to study every shade of Beaumarchais' mind and disposition in this correspondence of his youth. I have looked through it with curiosity for some traces of his opinion on the Spanish drama. It is rather astonishing to find that on this point he confined himself to a few unimportant observations. He directs his attention more to manners and customs than to the stage. All that he says about it may be said to be limited to a passage in a letter to the Duke de la Vallière, dated December 24th, 1764, in which Beaumarchais, after going into long details on the subject of the administration, politics, and manners of Spain, expresses himself thus:

"The Spanish theatre is at least two centuries younger than ours; both as regards decency and the plays themselves, they may figure with propriety by the side of those of Hardy and his contemporaries. Their music, on the other hand, may be ranked immediately after the beautiful Italian music, and before our own. The warmth and gayety of the interludes, all in music, with which they divide the wearisome acts of their insipid dramas, very often compensates for the *ennui* which is produced by listening to them. They are called *tonadillas* or *saynètes*. Dancing is absolutely unknown here. I

speak of figure dancing, for I can not honor with this name the grotesque and often indecent movements of the Moorish dances, and those of Grenada, which constitute the delight of the people."

This extract would seem to prove that Beaumarchais has no high opinion of the Spanish theatre. The time has not yet arrived for us to examine how much he derived from it. It is evident that he produced an entire alteration in the types which he borrowed from it. But, on the other hand, it can be seen, even from this letter, that the general action of the Spanish comedy, above all, the liveliness of the interludes and saynètes, produced a marked impression upon him. When he left Spain, after a year's residence there, he had failed in his commercial speculations, but he came back richer than he was himself aware, for he brought with him the first lineaments of those strongly-marked and original characters, Figaro, Rosina, Almaviva, Bartholo, and Basile, who were one day to be the glory of his name.

CHAPTER VI.

Beaumarchais on his Return from Spain.—An Episode in his Private Life.—His Love-affair with Pauline.—Beaumarchais' Love-letters.—Figaro, Pauline's Friend.

BEFORE following Beaumarchais in his literary career, which* we shall see him enter upon soon—rather late in life, in fact in his thirty-sixth year—we must first of all direct our attention to a love-affair in which he was engaged, not on another person's behalf (as in the Clavijo episode), but on his own account. The affair had been going on for some years, and was only brought to a termination about the period of his life at which we have arrived.

In Beaumarchais' letter to his sister Julie, which we have just quoted, the following sentence occurs: "I shall write on Wednesday to my *Pauline* and her aunt." In other letters, which were written some months later, he speaks of selling all his appointments in France, and going to settle in St. Domingo "with *Pauline*." Finally, in the weakest, but, perhaps, the most correctly written of his three dramas, "The Two

Friends," he represents, with much success, a young person of amiability and distinction, to whom he gives the name of Pauline, and introduces several family scenes which seem to have been copied from nature.

There existed, then, a Pauline, who exercised a certain influence over his heart: I say a *certain influence*, for I must confess with regret that in what I have seen of Beaumarchais' love-letters, written at different periods, I have not found any proof of his ever having been deeply in love. Indeed, this happiness or misfortune is not common, and Rochefoucauld was right when he said, "It is with love as with the apparition of spirits: every one speaks of them, but few have seen them; love lends its name to an infinite number of affairs which are attributed to it, and with which it has no more concern than the doge has with what takes place in Venice." Beaumarchais had a great many of these affairs, of which La Rochefoucauld speaks; but if women have often been the amusement of his life, they have never been either its occupation, its inspiration, or its torment. "My recreation, after the business of the day," he writes somewhere, "consists in the 'Belles Lettres,' beautiful music, and *sometimes* in the society of beautiful women." The word *sometimes* is inserted from modesty. On this point, as in many others, Beaumarchais was a child of his century; he has many amiable qualities, but in love he is superficial, more sensual than sentimental, and altogether very much of a pagan in his attachments, and even, as a pagan, not susceptible of any very strong passion. We must not expect from him, then, either the jealous transport of an Othello, nor the hidden torment of Molière, nor the ecstasy of Rousseau at Eaubonne, in the neighborhood of Madame d'Houdetot, nor that ardent thirst for the unchangeable and infinite in love which inspired the author of the "Meditations" with the *Lake*.* Besides, Beaumarchais' affair was a little romance in the approved style, which was to terminate with a marriage: it was that, perhaps, which cooled Beaumarchais' ardor, and which, while it held his habitually free pen somewhat in check, at the same time makes his style appear somewhat commonplace, when we reflect that he is attempting to

* Lamartine.

convey to a young girl the expression of his candid and sincere affection. Accordingly, Pauline's letters are much more interesting than his. In the mean while, it will be seen that his part in the romance is a curious and rather a novel one for him, inasmuch as he at last claims to be regarded as a victim, and really is a victim in one way, while it only requires a certain amount of confidence in his statements for us to believe that his deception had driven him almost to madness. He here appears as the antithesis to Clavijo; Pauline is the Clavijo, or, rather, there is a Clavijo who takes Pauline from him. Let us endeavor to arrive at the truth of this matter by means of a somewhat voluminous packet of papers, on which Beaumarchais has written with his own hand, "*Affair of Mademoiselle le B—, afterward Madame de S—.*" The names are written in full length; but, although the adventure is more than a century old, it appears to me better to confine myself to the initials only, my object in giving this detail of Beaumarchais' private life being solely that of studying and analyzing thoroughly the mind and character of a man who may be taken as a fair representative of the ideas and character of his epoch.

And, in the first place, let us thank Heaven that there really was an affair of business, that is to say, a debt in connection with this episode of love; otherwise it would have met with the fate of other episodes of the same nature which the elder Gudin, the worthy cashier who arranged the papers of Beaumarchais after his death, has treated with sovereign contempt—tearing up the papers relating to them in so complete a manner that all my efforts to replace the fragments in their proper places were quite in vain. In the case of the Pauline episode, Gudin has been of some help to me. Directly there appeared to be a debt in connection with the matter, every paper bearing upon the subject became sacred, and it is only in the character of "proofs in writing" that some very affectionate letters from a most amiable young girl have been suffered to live through a period of ninety-two years, classed, numbered, and docketed. If the claim has now expired, the letters remain, and there is a certain pleasure in discovering on the decayed paper, in all their life, the palpitations of a heart which has long ceased to beat, but which had once its moments of youth and love.

Pauline le B—— was a young Creole, and was born in the island of St. Domingo, which, as the reader is aware, at that time belonged to France. She was an orphan, and had been brought up in Paris, under the direction of her aunt: she possessed an estate of some magnitude, which was estimated at two million francs, but which was much encumbered with debts, and had been much worked and much exhausted by the trustees, as often happens to the estate of a minor, above all when the estate is in the colonies; so that, with all the appearance and expectation of having a large fortune, Pauline was in reality poor enough: but she was very pretty, and in all the letters in which she is mentioned she is always called the *beautiful*, or the *charming Pauline*.

In one of these letters, her *gentle, delicate, childlike* appearance, and her *enchanted voice* are spoken of: it has been already seen, from one of old M. Caron's letters, that she was a very good musician. She was the *Pauline*, then, of "The Two Friends," "with," as Méléac says, "a charming face, a flexible and sympathetic voice, and, above all, full of soul."

Mademoiselle le B——'s aunt was distantly related to the Caron family. The intimacy between the two families appears to have been great, as far back as 1760. Beaumarchais, who lost his first wife when he was about twenty-eight years of age, was, as the reader is aware, of very prepossessing appearance, and to his natural advantages was now added a certain *éclat*, which he obtained from his position at the court: soon afterward he bought the places of King's Secretary and Lieutenant-general of the Preserves; made some fortunate speculation with Du Verney; installed his family, as I have before stated, in the house in the Rue de Condé, where he spent all the time which was left him by his occupations at Versailles; worshiped by his sisters, and paying a great deal of attention to their friend Pauline, who was then about eighteen or nineteen. The first scene of "The Two Friends," which represents Pauline sitting at the harpsichord, playing a sonata, while Méléac, standing behind her, is playing the violin; the playful, affectionate conversation which follows the sonata—all this has the appearance of a reminiscence. Beaumarchais not only made a point of trying to please Pau-

line, he rendered her important services: he endeavored to penetrate the confused state of her resources, and to get her property into a more satisfactory condition. With this view he obtained an introduction from the princess to M. de Clugny, the Governor of St. Domingo, and altogether behaved like a devoted lover and a sincere friend.

It will be easily understood that the young Creole soon formed a strong inclination for so amiable a guardian. The guardian, on his side, seemed much struck with the charms of his pupil; nevertheless, as love never deprived him of his reason, before making up his mind to ask for Pauline's hand, he sent one of his own relations to St. Domingo with a sum of 10,000 francs, and a considerable cargo of different articles suitable to the requirements of Pauline's habitation. This relation had also a special commission to ascertain the exact state of Mademoiselle B——'s fortune, and see what could best be done with her property. It was after his departure, in 1763, that the correspondence took place between Pauline and Beaumarchais, from which we are about to make some extracts. To understand the first letter, it must be known that Pauline, who had been brought up by a widow aunt, had an uncle in Paris who was a widower, and who, consequently, was not her aunt's husband. This uncle was tolerably rich, and had no children. Let us now listen to Beaumarchais in love, but at the same time perfectly prudent, and indulging in a number of periphrases in order to maintain the alliance between love and prudence.

"You thought I was sad, my dear, amiable Pauline, but I was only occupied with a number of things I had to say to you, and which appear to me so serious and important, that, while thinking of them, I came to the conclusion that I could not do better than write them to you, so that, having them before you on paper, you might at once understand their full import. If I spoke to you on the subject, you would perhaps only remember the general tenor of my remarks, and might thus end by misunderstanding them, and it is very important that things upon which the happiness of my life depends should be clearly explained. You must have been aware, my dear Pauline, that a sincere and lasting attachment was the cause of my doing all I have done for you; although I have been sufficiently prudent not to make a direct proposition for your hand until I knew I could place

you in a proper position. All my actions must have proved what my intentions were, and that they were honorable. Now that I have carried out my promises, and advanced money for the settlement of your affairs, I am anxious to gather the sweet fruit of my labors; I even spoke of it yesterday to your uncle, who appeared favorably disposed toward me. I must even confess to you that I went so far as to flatter myself that you would not withhold your consent when I explained to you clearly what my intentions were. Pardon me, my dear Pauline; it was not in any spirit of presumption that I made this avowal to him. I thought I might look upon your constant friendship as an earnest of what I stated. Will you disavow me? One thing alone stops me, my dear Pauline: I find that, with care and proper economy, the state of my affairs will enable me to offer you an agreeable future, and this is the sole object of my heart; but if, by some dreadful misfortune, all the money which I have sent to St. Domingo should be lost in setting to rights an affair, the particulars of which we at present know only through the representations of others, my means would not allow me to maintain you in the position in which I should first of all have placed you, and in that case, how great would be my grief! I should encounter universal censure, and my Pauline would be in comparative distress. This uncertainty is, then, the only reason which compels me to delay asking for your hand, for which I have long sighed. I do not know what you are entitled to from your uncle's property, either on account of the dowry of your late aunt, or on account of the debts which I have heard spoken of indirectly. It would be unbecoming on my part to ask for any explanation on this point either from you or from him. My disposition is averse to it; and as his niece, for whom he appears to have much affection, may hope to receive some favors from him on the occasion of her marriage, it appears to me that it would be wrong to go into any strict reckonings, which should never take place between relations who are on good terms with one another. I shall not, then, say a word upon this subject.

"However, my dear Pauline, in order to be happy, it is necessary we should be at ease with respect to our future existence; and I should no sooner have clasped you in my arms than I should tremble lest some misfortune should make us lose the money sent to America; for that purpose I have set aside no less than 80,000 francs. This, my dear Pauline, will explain a silence which, after what I had done, must have appeared strange to you. There are two courses open to you if you accept my offer: the first is, to wait until the full success of my plans enables me to place you in a proper position; the second, that you should get your aunt, if my views be agreeable to her, to ascertain the opinion of your uncle on the subject. Far

from wishing, however, that he should diminish his means in order to increase yours, I am quite ready to give up a portion of my own property in order to render his old age more comfortable, if the present position of his affairs should require it. You know me well enough to believe that I would make any such advances. But, if his affection for you should induce him to settle any thing upon you, my desire is that you should, under no circumstances, succeed to whatever property he may bestow upon you until death should prevent him enjoying it himself; and since what a person gives at his death will soon cease to belong to him at all, I do not think it would be unbecoming to solicit some such favor from an uncle, who will act as a father to you on the occasion of your marriage, and who has a right to expect increased happiness in his old age from your care and attention. With some assurance from him on this point, we shall be able to conclude our happy union, and to look upon the money which has been sent away as a sort of nest-egg for the future in case of success, while, in case of failure, we shall be compensated for it by the kindness of your uncle. Give me your opinion on the subject when you send your answer. My affection for you will always stand before every thing else, even before my prudence. My fate is in your hands, yours is in that of your uncle."

Freed from all its rhetorical artifice, this periphrastic letter means, "I love you very much, but I can not marry you until I know what your estate will bring in, or until your uncle promises to leave you his fortune."

Let those, however, who may be inclined to exclaim at this excessive prudence on the part of Beaumarchais, remember that on the score of friendship he had shown no prudence at all when he advanced a considerable capital in money and goods for the St. Domingo estate. It is, at the same time, true that a sensitive girl might not have felt much flattered by this exhibition of affection and self-interest; but a person who is in love does not always look at things so closely; and the proof that Pauline's heart was engaged more deeply than that of Beaumarchais is found in her reply. It will, I think, be found more interesting than the somewhat involved epistle which the reader has just seen. It appears to me to express the true sentiments of an ingenuous and devoted young heart. Here it is.

"Your letter, my dear friend,* has thrown me into a state of great

* *Monsieur mon bon ami.*

trouble. I did not feel myself able to reply to it alone, and at the same time I thought it best not to show it to my aunt, as her affection for me—which is what I value most in her—would have been of no assistance to me. You will doubtless be astonished at the intrepid step I took: the moment was favorable, your letter was pressing, and my embarrassment was perhaps of more assistance to me than the best advice. I went and threw myself into my uncle's arms; the ice was broken; I opened my heart to him without reserve; I asked him to guide me with his advice and affection, and at last ventured, my dear friend, to give him your letter without your consent. All this was a sudden impulse of my own, and I am pleased that I overcame my blushes and timidity in order that he might himself know the inmost feelings of my heart. It appeared to me as though the confidence I was placing in him increased his kindness. Indeed, my dear friend, I am very pleased at having gone to see him of my own accord. I became convinced, from conversing with him, of his good feeling toward me; and what pleased me still more was, that I found he was full of esteem for you, and rendered you all that justice which your friends render you with so much pleasure. I like him a thousand times more for it. With regard to the answers to the important points in your letter, he wishes to speak to you about them himself. I should acquit myself too imperfectly of such a task to think of undertaking it. He wishes to see you on the subject.

"You tell me that your fate is in my hands, and that mine is in those of my uncle. I now make my interests over to you. If you love me as I think you do, try and transfuse some of your own affectionate enthusiasm into the heart of my uncle. Your heart and intellect must on this occasion work together, my dear friend, and nothing can then resist you. Give me this proof of your affection. I shall look upon your success as the most convincing proof of your anxiety for what you call so charmingly the 'happiness of your life;' words which your foolish Pauline could not read without her heart beating in a fearful manner. Adieu, my dear friend; I hope your first visit, after leaving Versailles, will be to my uncle. Think of all the respect you owe him in case he should become yours also. I conclude, as I feel that I am writing the most extravagant nonsense possible. Good-night, torment."

The uncle having apparently refused to bind himself in a formal manner, the union between Pauline and Beaunarchais was nevertheless not broken off; but it was agreed that it should be postponed until after the settlement of the St. Domingo affairs. In the mean while they continued to see and love one another, and the heart of the young Creole became

more and more deeply committed. The packet I have before me only contains a few of her letters; the others were sent back to her, at her own request, after the rupture; but, as often happens in such a case, Beaumarchais took care to keep the most strongly marked ones; perhaps Pauline, on her side, acted in the same manner, for in the series of her lover's letters there occurs now and then a hiatus which throws a slight shadow over the various incidents of this little domestic romance.

In general, those of Beaumarchais' letters which remain in the packet are wanting in enthusiasm and poetry. One would think that so charming a person would have inspired something better. However, some of his strange epistles are not without interest, as tending to explain that original and complex character known as Figaro. It has been sometimes said that the analytic, reasoning side of this character, who is otherwise so active and bustling, was purely artificial—that it was only a device for enabling the author to introduce allusions to things of the day, and satirical observations on society. Now it is easy enough to see in the letters from Madrid, which we have quoted, how much Beaumarchais was naturally a man both of action and analysis—an Abbé de Gondi and a Montaigne; how much he delights in interrupting his narratives from time to time for the sake of philosophizing at random either about himself or any one else. This peculiarity is shown in a still more striking manner in his correspondence with Pauline. In the famous Monologue of the fifth act of the "Marriage of Figaro," the hero appears in a strange light, choosing, as he does, the very moment when he is eaten up with jealousy for entering upon a dissertation *de omni re scibili*; but not less strange does Beaumarchais appear when, at the age of thirty, he sends dissertations in the style of the following to a young girl who loves him and with whom he is in love.

"I thank you, my dear Pauline, for the praises you award to my first letter,* but it has assuredly been more successful than you can

* Not the letter we have quoted, but a previous one, full of *badinage*, which Beaumarchais had sent, saying that he was determined not to commence the correspondence.

be aware. It has touched your *amour propre* : a desire to reproach me produces the necessity of writing to me, and hence I have a letter from you. That is all I desired ; the summit of my wishes has been attained. You have written to me first, for my letter which you complain of can scarcely be considered one at all. The second is of a different kind, it having been necessitated by business. It follows, from all this, that you have been the first to write. My self-love is gratified ; and when we say self-love, we mean love also, for the latter feeling is only an extension of the former toward an object which we consider worthy of us. We love ourselves when we love our mistress, and applaud the judicious choice which testifies to our good taste ; we love ourselves when we lavish our affection upon her, and thus endeavor to incline her heart toward us. . . . All the happiness or unhappiness of life must be looked at from one point of view ; it must be considered with reference to its effect upon ourselves ; without this self-love we can experience no passion at all. It is of divine origin, and the love of a charming creature is only so delightful because it proceeds secretly from love of self. Pardon me, my darling Pauline, if I assume the character of a metaphysician ; what I have written has escaped me, and can not be altogether obscure to so enlightened, delicate, and refined a perception as yours. I leave, then, or rather, abjure all trifling, as your affectionate love must expect something more serious from me."

We would think now that Beaumarchais was about to indulge in sentiment. Not at all so ; he is about to commence another dissertation, but on another point.

"Listen to me, fair child ; the pen should be directed by the impulse of sentiment alone : the man who reflects when he is writing to his mistress is a knave, and is deceiving her. What can it matter about a letter being nicely phrased, about the periods being well rounded ? True love is not particular about such details : love begins a sentence which it thinks a good one, breaks it off to begin another, which strikes it as better ; a third suggests itself, which has more warmth than either of the others ; confusion ensues ; through having so much to express, you express it badly. Ah ! this confusion is sweet food for the heart which finds it on the paper. The epidemic, in spite of space and time, is communicated by reading the letter, and the charm is willingly shared of a confusion which one is conscious of having been the first to produce. She says to herself, 'When my lover writes or speaks about business, he does so in a sensible manner ; his ideas are linked together, his conclusions follow naturally from his premises ; every thing proceeds to one common end ; but as soon as he gives his pen up to his poor heart, he

commences tranquilly, then warms up, at last wanders, and refuses to be guided on his road. Thinking of one thing alone, how can it matter to him what he says, provided he proves that he loves? Well, you are right, my dear little girl, and I accept the privilege which your example gives me.* I tell you that I love you: I repeat it; do you believe it? If you doubt, the misfortune is your own. My own consciousness of my affection constitutes my real happiness; your opinion of it only occupies a secondary position. I would rather forgive your injustice than deserve it. In the first place, the love we feel; in the second, that which we inspire—such are the real gradations in the soul's happiness. What can I say to you? My heart is full of your last thought. It will require more than half an hour of silence and repose before it can regain the calmness which the noble fire that elevates it when I write to you has caused it to lose; but, far from complaining, I delight in this situation.

"Ah! good heavens! I was going to begin another sheet, and I have no more paper; I have not been writing more than five minutes Marchand,† in future I must have some *papier à la Tellière* for my letters to Paris."

While making allowance for Beaumarchais' fondness for dissertation, we may perhaps be allowed to call in question the sincerity of a love which he concludes with such a peroration. While he is endeavoring to prove that a certain want of connection in ideas is one of the characteristics of passion—which is quite true—the writer of the letter does not appear to join the example to the precept; afterward he appears to be striving his utmost to attain the desired confusion, and it is difficult to find any signs of the "noble fire" which deprives him of his calmness, the more so as the writing itself is particularly quiet and subdued. Beaumarchais is seen to greater advantage when he is satisfied with being simple, gay, and good-humored, as in the following note:

"Good-day, dear aunt; I embrace you, my beloved Pauline; your servant, my charming Perrette.‡ My little children, love one another."

* The privilege of *tutoiement*, or of using the *tu* and *toi* of the singular instead of the *vous* of the plural.—TRANS.

It will be seen that Pauline adopted the *tutoiement* first. This was sometimes the case in the eighteenth century, according to the "*Nouvelle Héloïse*," in which Julie is made to take the initiative in the familiar mode of address.

† Beaumarchais' servant.

‡ This charming Perrette—who used to live with the aunt, in what

er ; it is the precept of the apostle. One of you will love me, I sometimes say to myself, as her son, one of you will love me as her brother ; while my Pauline, uniting all kinds of love in her good little heart, will inundate me with a deluge of affection, to which I shall reply according to the power given by Providence to your devoted servant, your sincere friend, your future But stop ! what was I about to write ? It would have gone beyond the bounds of the profound respect with which I have the honor to be, mademoiselle, &c., &c."

I find in one of Julie's letters of this period a passage in which, with her accustomed *verve*, she represents three pairs of lovers, who at the beginning of 1764 were enlivening the establishment in the Rue de Condé, and the old age of M. Caron, senior, with their preparations for marriage. All the characters but one, of whom we shall hear directly, are already known to the reader ; he will perhaps be pleased to see them once more grouped by the lively and amusing pencil of Julie.

"Our house," she writes to her friend Helen, "is a nest of lovers, living in love and hope. I laugh at it more than any of the others, because I am less in love than any of them ; but I can understand that, to the philosophic eye, it would present a picture equally useful and interesting. Beaumarchais is a perverse being, who by his levity teases and grieves Pauline. Boisgarnier and Miron discuss sentiment until they are out of breath, and reason themselves systematically into a state of sublime irrationality ; the Chevalier and myself are even worse ; he as loving as an angel, as affectionate as a seraph, while I am as lively as a linnet and as malicious as a demon. Love does not make me so lackadaisical as the others, but nevertheless, in spite of my mad disposition, I can not escape from it altogether ; that is the worst of the matter."

Indeed Julie, in spite of her offhand manner, cares rather more for the chevalier than she chooses to admit. This new character, who is about to play a part in the episode we have undertaken to narrate, was the Chevalier de S——. He was born, I think, at St. Domingo, and was the Deputy Advocate-general at the Supreme Council. Although a compatriot of Pauline's, he did not know her when he first became acquainted with Beaumarchais, who introduced him to his

capacity I am unable to say—was soon the cause of much uneasiness to Pauline, and afterward became the pretext for her rupture with Beaumarchais.

family, and witnessed with pleasure the attention he paid to his sister Julie. He was, it appears, rather poor, but he had a name, a good position, and would have been a good match for Julie, who had no fortune beyond what she might expect from the generosity of her brother.

Things were in this position when Beaumarchais started for Spain, still engaged to Pauline, who continued to write him very affectionate letters, complaining occasionally that he omitted to answer them, while Julie was imprudent enough to amuse herself by teasing the young Creole with accounts of the gayety of her devoted servant at Madrid. "When are you coming back?" exclaims Pauline in one of her letters. "Horrid journey! how it distresses me, gracious Heaven!" And Julie, who is always kind in spite of her satire, and who is very fond of Pauline, attacks in her way the laziness of her brother, and tells him to "write a word to this child."

Although Pauline's betrothed does not appear sufficiently ardent in his affection, we must acknowledge that he looks after her interest with all the zeal of a sincere friend. The news which he receives from St. Domingo by the relative whom he had sent there is unfavorable: the estate is in a deplorable condition, and mortgaged beyond its value; the relative himself dies, and all the money and goods which Beaumarchais had intrusted to him had been sunk, as Beaumarchais had feared it would be, in the property. In spite of this, Beaumarchais, on his return from Spain, seemed still resolved to marry Pauline. He thought of letting the estate be sold by the creditors, and buying it in himself; but he was told that if well administered it would produce a considerable revenue. In the mean while, a misunderstanding arose between himself and his betrothed, which was occasioned in the first instance by his own levity. In the midst of it all, he heard that the Chevalier de S——, who had first of all appeared as an aspirant for the hand of his sister Julie, had now views on Pauline. The chevalier denies it strongly in a letter to Beaumarchais, which terminates as follows:

"It appears to me, sir, that a story without foundation should find less favor in your eyes than in those of any one else, both because yours are better, and because you have been all your life the victim

of such tales. However, I beg you to believe that I do not write to you in order to obtain your pardon, but because it is a duty I owe to myself and to Mademoiselle le B—— to make the truth known with regard to a subject which compromises her, and because it would be painful, and very painful to me, to lose your esteem."

Pauline, when interrogated on the subject, replied by this very abrupt note, which already indicates a considerable alteration in her sentiments :

"As I was unaware, before I received your letter, of the chevalier's intentions, and as the whole affair is unintelligible to me, you will allow me to enlighten myself before I send you an answer. With regard to the reproach you address to me in reference to Julie, I do not think I deserve it. If I have not sent to inquire after her as often as I ought to have done, it was because I had been assured that she was much better, and that she had been seen at the window, which made me think that the news of her improvement was true. If my aunt were not suffering from her attack of erysipelas, which prevents me leaving the house, I should certainly go and see her : I embrace her with all my heart."

Both the accused parties were in all probability innocent at this period, if I can judge by a letter from a cousin of Pauline's, who was one of Beaumarchais' friends, and who, after being addressed by him on the subject in a very violent manner, replies, "When you are in a more tranquil state of mind, and render me justice, I will speak to you openly, and I will prove to you that you, who condemn others so easily, are more guilty than those whom you accuse of dissimulation, treachery, or perfidy. Nothing is so pure as the heart of dear Pauline, more noble than that of the chevalier, or more sincere than mine, and yet you look upon all three of us as monsters!" The same letter indicates that Beaumarchais, in his irritation, was no longer willing to marry Pauline ; for it contains the following passage : "You tell me to keep the contents of your letter secret ; rest assured that I shall do so ; but I think it singular that you should determine not to marry Mademoiselle le B——, and yet require me not to mention it."

What took place between the date of this letter—(and we may state parenthetically that it is almost the only one which is dated, a point which has rendered the sifting of this affair rather a difficult matter)—what took place between the date

of the last letter, November 8, 1765, and the date of February 11, 1766, which appears to be that of the final rupture between Pauline and Beaumarchais? Here a slight hiatus occurs; but enough documents have been preserved to enable us to understand the contents of those which are missing. It is evident that what was at first but a report, perhaps without foundation, became gradually the truth. Whether Pauline's love ceased under the influence of Beaumarchais' *levities* (and it will be seen farther on that that was the reason or pretext alleged), or whether the long delay and the hesitation which he exhibited in making up his mind to the marriage wounded her *amour propre*, or alarmed her about the future, or whether she simply took a fancy to the Chevalier de S——, it is certain that she became more and more attached to him. The chevalier, on the other hand, who a year previously, in writing to Beaumarchais, had said of Julie, "She is the only object of my thoughts and affection;" the chevalier, whether he had been set at liberty by Julie, or had set himself at liberty, was becoming attracted more and more toward Pauline, and at last appeared to be on the point of supplanting Beaumarchais. At this juncture, Beaumarchais, on the same day, wrote two letters, one after another, to Pauline, which I give almost entire, not as models of style, for they have no literary value, but because they appear to me to contain materials which are of use for the study of mankind in general, and that of Beaumarchais in particular.

In novels, each impulse of the human heart is generally represented by itself in sharp, strongly-marked, unmixed colors. In real life, however, we find that when an impulse is not sufficiently powerful (which is generally the case) to stifle all the others, the human heart presents a spectacle of confusion, in which very different (and often contrary) feelings are at work at the same time. Thus, in the letters which are about to be placed before the reader, may be distinguished a remnant of love, awakened and excited by jealousy, but repressed in its utterance by vanity; scruples of delicacy and honor, fears of what the world will say, a wish to prove that the writer has nothing to reproach himself with, an intention to marry the young lady, and yet a certain unwillingness to be taken at his

word; for although these letters contain a very formal offer of marriage, they also contain passages which are sufficiently abrupt and cutting to make Pauline reply by a refusal. On the other hand, it is evident, above all, in the second letter, that Beaumarchais fears this refusal, and, either from love or self-love,* wishes to prevent it:

“ You have given me up,” he writes to Pauline; “ and what period have you chosen for doing so? That which I intended, before your friends and my own, to be the epoch of our union. I have seen perfidy taking advantage of weakness, in order to turn every thing, even my own offers, against myself. I have seen you—you who have so often complained of the acts of injustice which men have committed toward me—I have seen you join with them to inflict on me injuries of which I had never dreamed. If I had not meant to marry you, should I have attended so little to the usual forms in the services which I have rendered you? Should I have assembled my friends, two months before your refusal, to tell them my final resolution, which I had asked them to keep secret in consequence of certain precautions which I could not mention, but which made it absolutely necessary for me to act as I did? Every thing has been turned against me. The conduct of a double-faced and perfidious friend,† while it gave me a painful lesson, at the same time taught me that there was no woman, however amiable and affectionate, who could not be seduced and caused to change. At the same time, the contempt of all who witnessed his conduct is his just reward. Let me now come back to yourself. It is not without regret that I have directed my thoughts toward you, since the first warmth of my resentment has passed away; and when I insisted that you should state to me in writing that you rejected my offer of marriage, there was mixed with my annoyance a secret curiosity to know whether you would take that final step. I must now satisfy my conscience about it completely. I have received a very advantageous proposition of marriage; as I was on the point of accepting it, I all at once felt myself unable to do so. Some scruple of honor—some recollection of the past, made me hesitate. I ought certainly to consider myself free and released from all obligations to you after what has taken place. However, I am not at rest; your letters do not tell me, in a sufficiently formal way, what it is so necessary for me to know. Tell me truly, I beg of you—Have you so entirely given me up that I am at liberty to contract an engagement with another woman? Consult your heart on this

* It has been seen above that, according to his theory, the two feelings were inseparable.

† This is evidently intended for the Chevalier de S——.

point while my scrupulousness puts the question to you. If you have totally severed the knot which was to have united us, do not fear to tell me so forthwith. In order that your *amour propre* may be quite at ease with regard to the request I am making to you, I must add that I now place all things in the same position they were in before all this misunderstanding. My request would not be just if, by way of laying a snare for you, I did not leave you at liberty to send me whatever answer you thought best. If you do not set me free, write to me that you are the same sweet, affectionate Pauline for life whom I knew formerly, and that you will esteem yourself happy in being mine : that moment I break off with all but yourself. I only ask you to say nothing about it for three days to any one on earth without a single exception ; and in that case, keep this letter, and let your answer be brought back to me. If your heart be given to another, or you entertain an insuperable aversion to me, at least appreciate my attention in sending you this letter. Give the bearer your declaration setting me at liberty ; I shall feel from the bottom of my heart that I have fulfilled all my duties toward you, and shall be satisfied with myself. Farewell ; I am—until I receive your answer, under whatever appellation you choose to give me—Mademoiselle, your very humble, &c.,

DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

This first letter was not very engaging ; it had been delivered to Pauline and withdrawn before she had time to answer it. Beaumarchais sent it back to her the same day with a second one, which we subjoin.

" Friday evening.

" I asked you to send me an answer in writing. You sent after my sister to ask her for the letter to which you promised a reply. She thought it best to withdraw it from you, and give it back to me. I now send it you again, begging that you will read it with attention, and give a formal answer to it. I wish very much that no one stood between you and myself, in order that I might be able to count on the truth of what you may state to me. I send you back your packet of letters. If you retain them, join mine to your reply. The perusal of your letters has had a great effect on me, and I do not wish to undergo so much pain another time. But, before answering me, consider well what will be most advantageous, both as regards your fortune and your happiness. My object is, that, forgetting all that has occurred, we pass our days agreeably and tranquilly. Do not let the fear of having to live with any members of my family, who might not please you, interfere with your affection, if it has not been extinguished by a passion for some one else. My home will be so arranged, that, whether it be you or any one else, my wife will always

be mistress in my house. Your uncle burst out laughing when I complained that he was opposed to my union with you. He said that, in his opinion, I had no occasion to fear a refusal, or otherwise that his niece must have lost her senses. It is true that, when I was on the point of giving you up forever, I experienced an emotion which taught me that I cared more for you than I thought. What I ask from you, then, is asked in the best faith in the world. Do not flatter yourself that you will ever expose me to the chagrin of seeing you the wife of a certain man. He would require some daring to lift his eyes before the public if he meditated the accomplishment of a twofold perfidy. Pardon me if I express myself with warmth. The thought never entered my head without making all my blood boil.*

“But, whatever may be your decision, do not delay informing me of it, for I have suspended every thing that I was engaged in, in order to give myself up once more to you. Your uncle has represented to me how little advantageous this marriage would be to me, but I am far from attending to any such considerations. I wish to leave you once more to yourself alone, or let every thing be finished between us for life. I rely upon your keeping all this secret† from every one but your aunt. You can understand that I should have a dreadful cause of complaint against you if I discovered that you had not kept this secret. No one in the world suspects that I have written to you. I confess it would appear delightful to me if, while all our enemies were slumbering, peace could be concluded between us. Read your letters again, and you will understand how, in the recesses of my heart, I found all those feelings which they originally created.”

Pauline's answer is much more laconic and much more intelligible than the two letters which have just been given. In her case there are no conflicting sentiments. She loves Beaumarchais no longer, and she loves some one else. This is very simple and very evident.

“I can only repeat to you, sir, what I said to your sister, that I have come to a decision, and shall not depart from it. Accordingly, I thank you for your offer, and hope with all my heart you may marry some one who will make you happy. I shall hear of it with pleasure, as I shall of every thing else which brings you good fortune. I

* The Chevalier de S—— again. Here, at all events, is something passionate, but it is the only bit of “Othello” I can find in all Beaumarchais' letters. The whole passage indicates that he had at the time a sincere desire to marry the young lady.

† What a desire for mystery! Does it proceed from uneasy vanity, or from some other cause? Upon this point the letters throw no light.

have already assured your sister of this. My aunt and myself have also to tell you how vexed we are that you should show us such disregard as to speak very ill, in connection with his conduct toward us, of a man whom we look upon as our friend. I know better than any one can how wrong you are in saying that he is perfidious.* I again told your sister this morning that a young lady who used to live with my aunt was the cause of all that takes place now,† and that since that time I had been only kept back by the world. You have still several letters of mine, two of which were written at the time in question, another when I was at Fontainebleau, besides some others, which I beg you will send me. I shall request one of our friends from St. Domingo, as I have already informed you, to call upon you and conclude all that remains to be terminated between us.

"I am most perfectly, sir, your very humble and obedient servant.

"LE B——."

Pauline, who formerly concluded, "I am for life your faithful Pauline," now signs politely with her surname; and this correspondence terminates, like a great many others of the same kind, with, "I have the honor to be your most obedient servant," after beginning with protestations of eternal love.

Finally, to finish the episode, comes Pauline's cousin, of whom I have spoken, and who at least dates his letter, which renders him estimable in the eyes of posterity. He has become reconciled with Beaumarchais' brother, and, while he makes conditions for his cousin, he at the same time says no more about the innocence of the chevalier, which probably begins to strike him as less evident.

"All is finished, my dear Beaumarchais, and without hope: I have expressed your wishes to Madame G—— and Mademoiselle le B——, and they are as anxious as you can be that the affair should be broken off in a quiet manner: the thing is, now, to regulate accounts between you and Mademoiselle le B——, and make arrangements for repaying you the sum which will remain due to you. The

* The defense of the fortunate rival, in which Pauline, like a real daughter of Eve, as she is, makes her aunt take part, and speaks in the plural, must have been rather a difficult morsel for Beaumarchais to digest.

† Here Pauline is not, perhaps, very sincere in screening herself behind Mademoiselle Perrette. She alleges an old infidelity which had long since been forgiven; at the same time, she asks for her letters of that period; but, as they are the most interesting, Beaumarchais takes care to forget to give them back.

ladies also beg that you will place in my hands all the papers you have in connection with Mademoiselle le B——. You can not imagine how distressed I am at not having been able to unite two hearts which had so long appeared to me to be made for one another ; but *man proposes and God disposes*. I flatter myself that, on both sides, the justice which I think I deserve will be rendered to me. I have allowed you to read my heart, and you must have seen that I am a stranger to all artifice and deception. Adieu, my friend : I shall go to see you as soon as possible ; in the mean while, let me hear from you. I embrace you, and am always your sincere friend, P——.

"Evening of Shrove Tuesday, February 11, 1766."

Let us render this worthy cousin, whose sentences are "more consoling than new,"* the justice which he claims, and let us acknowledge that he had nothing to do with the chevalier's perfidy. At all events, some months after the letter was written, while Julie's adorer married Pauline, Beaumarchais had the annoyance of seeing his former betrothed become Madame de S——, and thus cause him the chagrin of which he stood in so much dread, and the thought of which, as he told us, *made all the blood in his veins boil*.

If we were writing a novel, it would finish here, or it would end with the death of Beaumarchais, who would kill himself in despair, or with the death of the chevalier, who would be sacrificed to the fury of his rival ; but, as we are writing a true story, we are obliged, above every thing, to be accurate in our assertions, and to state that, instead of finishing with a suicide or a duel, the adventure terminated more prosaically with a settlement of accounts, in which the future author of the "Marriage of Figaro" presents rather a comic appearance in his double character of the lover who has been deceived, and the creditor who fears he will not be paid. I have laid so much stress upon the cold and calculating side of his attachment, that I feel myself bound to remind the reader that if he had shown an excess of prudence as regarded his affection, he had in his friendship been generous, even to prodigality. Not only had he advanced money to the aunt and niece without keeping any particular account of it, but he had, it will be remembered, risked a rather heavy sum on the dilapi-

* Bilboquet's phrase in the burlesque comedy of the "Saltimbanques."—TRANS.

dated estate in St. Domingo; this money was now lost, and the least that could be done by the man who had taken Pauline away from him was to put her accounts in order, if he did not pay them. Now that he has been sacrificed as a lover, Beaumarchais makes his appearance in the character of a strict creditor and expert calculator: he puts the capital and interest together, and brings in a bill, which he has drawn up with the most scrupulous accuracy. The chevalier, who has not time to occupy himself with such low details, and has gone to spend the honeymoon somewhere or other with Pauline, sends to Beaumarchais his elder brother, the Abbé de S——, a highly respectable abbé, but somewhat hasty and vexatious, who not only disputes Beaumarchais' bill, but sometimes allows himself to irritate a still bleeding wound, and to mix up the lover with the creditor. Hence arose very violent disputes, of which the following letter from Beaumarchais to the abbé will suffice to give some idea:

“Monsieur l'Abbé,—I beg you to remember that I have not been wanting in courtesy toward you, and that I owe nothing but contempt to the person whom you represent, as I have had the honor of telling you twenty times, and as I should have very much liked to tell him myself, if he had been as punctual in making his appearance as he has been clever in gaining his object. The proof that Mademoiselle le B—— was willing to accept me, my affection, my advice, my money, is that, without your brother, who disturbed a union which had existed for six years, she would still be availing herself of all the services which I lavished upon her, as long as they were agreeable and useful to her. It is true that she has purchased these services very dearly, for it is to our friendship for your brother that she owes the happiness of having married him, which would not have been the case if he had remained, without knowing us, in the place where he was then vegetating. I am not in the secret of the expression *apology*; accordingly, I must be excused from replying to it, and if I regret his absence, it is because I should do myself the pleasure on every occasion of telling him myself what he can now hear through a third person only. I shall not discontinue, by conferring benefits, to prepare myself for acts of injustice and atrocity. I have never suffered much from doing good in expectation of evil, and your advice will add nothing to my present inclinations in that respect.

“As you confess that you lose your temper with me, it would ill suit me to address any reproaches to you on the subject. It is suf-

ficient that you should accuse yourself for me to retain no feeling of resentment toward you.

"I do not know why you underline the words 'your sister,' when you remind me that it was as such that I loved Mademoiselle B——. Does this sarcasm fall upon her, upon me, or upon your brother? This, however, as you please. Although Mademoiselle B——'s fate no longer concerns me, it would not become me, in speaking of her, to make use of any expressions but those which I have employed. I do not complain of her.* She is, as you say, young and without experience; and, although she has very little property, your brother uses his experience advantageously in marrying her, and has indeed made a very good thing of it.

"Remember, once more, M. l'Abbé, that nothing I say about him at all applies to you. It would be too humiliating for a man of your cloth to be suspected of having had any thing to do with your brother's conduct toward me: let him have all the blame himself, and do not take up things which are not entitled to so polite an advocate as yourself.

"I have the honor to be, &c.,

BEAUMARCHAIS."

To put an end to these irritating debates, Beaumarchais made a considerable diminution in his claim, which was at last accepted at 24,441 livres, 4 sous, 4 deniers.

And now the shade of the charming Pauline must excuse me, but it appears certain that this claim, accepted and acknowledged by her, was never paid. Not only do I find it, among other papers of a later date, classed with the debts which are looked upon as almost hopeless, but the touching solicitude of Gudin, the cashier, after the death of his master, for the shortest love-letter from Pauline, is sufficient to show that this debt must be ranked with the "acknowledgments not acted upon," traces of which are to be found in Beaumarchais' papers, from rather a large number of agreeable women, poets, and noble lords. It must be stated that Pauline became a widow about a year after her marriage, so that this calamity probably interfered with the arrangement of her affairs. The latest *souvenir* of Pauline I can find in the packet of letters is in a letter addressed to her cousin, bearing the date of 1769, in which she says, with regard to Beaumarchais, "Let him rest in peace; he will be paid." This

* Here, again, is an instance of that kind and delicate feeling which Beaumarchais often exhibits, and which ought to be observed.

is rather cool in reference to a man one has loved a few moments *for life*. Did Pauline happen to think that her love, after all, was worth 24,441 livres, 4 sous, 4 deniers? It would be impossible to deny it; but, as such an hypothesis might give to certain very *demonstrative* letters a meaning which we need not look for in them, I hasten to put it aside as hastily formed, and I conclude that, if the young and beautiful Creole left the debt standing, it was in consequence of her St. Domingo estate being laid hold of by other creditors, or plundered by the blacks, or swallowed up by an earthquake.

Such is the exact story of the little drama in real life, under the influence of which Beaumarchais studied the art of writing dramas for the stage; for we are now in 1767, the year in which he made his first appearance in theatrical and literary life as the author of "*Eugénie*."

CHAPTER VII.

Beaumarchais' first Dramas.—*Eugénie*.—The Two Friends.—His second Marriage.

WE have now reached the moment at which Beaumarchais enters upon his literary career—in 1767, at thirty-five years of age, after he had had an experience of life in all its aspects. He was at this time convinced, wrongly enough, that his capabilities fitted him for the serious style, of which he writes a theory in the preface to the drama of "*Eugénie*." This theory is, for the most part, borrowed from that of Diderot, for whom the author of "*Eugénie*" professes the most lively admiration. It is couched in a style both less warm and less correct than that of Diderot, but with more precision, clearness, and method. He makes the principal points more evident, without adopting the too subtle distinctions between the four dramatic styles as laid down by his master. Beaumarchais advocates strongly the introduction of serious drama, "which," he says, "is a middle point between heroic tragedy and amusing comedy." He was, I think, the first of the dra-

matic writers of the period who called his piece a drama.* The drama, according to him, should be written in prose; its objects should be the representation of situations taken from common life; "the dialogue should be simple, and as natural as possible; real eloquence must be that which springs from situations, and the only coloring which can be allowed to it is the animated, hurried, broken, agitated, and true language of the passions."

It is 1767; Beaumarchais is completely unknown as a writer; he is a man of business and of pleasure, who has managed to push himself forward at court, who is spoken of in various ways, and whom the men of letters are disposed to receive as the courtiers received him, that is to say, as an intruder. Hence it was necessary for him to excite the public curiosity, to nurture it, and to look for followers and supporters in every rank; this he does with all that facility and diversity of talent which distinguish him; when, for instance, he wishes to read his drama to the princesses, he assumes the character of a courtier who condescends to occupy himself with literature in the interest of virtue and morals; he attributes to himself, beforehand, a celebrity which he has not obtained, and altogether exhibits extraordinary presumption.

"Mesdames,—The French company are going to represent, in a few days, a theatrical piece of a new description, for which the whole of Paris is looking out with the most lively impatience. In spite of the orders which I gave to the actors, on making them a present of the piece, to keep the name of the author a profound secret, they have thought, in their misplaced enthusiasm, to render me a service by neglecting my instructions, and have quietly divulged my name to all the world. As this work, the offspring of my emotions, breathes the most ardent love of virtue, and tends to purify our theatre by making it a school of good morals, I thought, before making it further known to the public, I was bound to offer it as a secret homage to my illustrious patronesses. Accordingly, Mesdames, I beg to be allowed to read it to you in private. After that, when the public, at the representation, will exalt me to the clouds, the greatest success of my drama will be that of having been honored by your tears, as its author has always been by your benefits."

* The two dramas by Diderot, and the one by Sedaine, were still called comedies.

The piece was played on the 29th of January, 1769, and was well received. It met with severity, however, from the critics of the day.

The author of "Eugénie," however, had no occasion to distress himself either about Grimm's "Correspondence," or Bachaumont's "Nouvelles," as neither of these sheets were public; but he was much annoyed by Fréron's "Année Littéraire," the opinions of which exercised a great influence, while its severity frightened him. Fréron had as yet written nothing about the piece, when Beaumarchais took an opportunity (not without going a long way to find it) of getting at the formidable critic, and addressed a letter to him, the modesty of which, when compared with that of his letter to Mesdames de France, which we have previously given, will help to give some notion of the diversity of his manner.

"I do not think I have the honor of being personally known to you, which makes me still more impressed by the kind things repeated to me yesterday evening. A person of my acquaintance, who met you in society, assured me it was impossible to speak with more moderation than you did of certain parts which appeared reprehensible to you in the drama of 'Eugénie,' or to praise with a more estimable frankness those which you thought calculated to interest right-minded people. In this way judicious and severe criticism becomes very useful to writers. If your occupations permit you to see the piece again to-night, now that I have taken out certain portions, which, in my limited acquaintance with the stage, I had at first considered good, I beg that you will do so by means of this ticket for the amphitheatre. When you have seen it a second time, I will beg your permission to call and have some talk with you about it. In the mean while, be assured of the high consideration and gratitude with which I have the honor to be, sir, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Now comes the answer of the austere Fréron.

"Saturday, Feb. 7, 1767.

"I am very sensible, sir, of your politeness, and very sorry I can not profit by it; but I never go to the play with tickets. Do not be offended at my sending you back the one you have done me the honor to address to me.*

* Do not this offer of a ticket, and Fréron's refusal of it, seem to indicate that, at this period, professional critics made it a point of honor to pay for their places at the theatre? I content myself with putting this insignificant question, not having the means of answering it at hand.

"As for your drama, I am delighted you are pleased at what I said of it; but I will not conceal from you that I thought and said more against than in favor of it, after the first representation, the only one I have seen. I have no doubt that the excisions which had to be made, and which you have made in this work, have improved it. The success which it meets with at present makes me presume so. I propose to go and see it next week, and I shall be very pleased, I can assure you, sir, to join my approbation to that of the public.

"I have the honor to be, with the highest consideration, &c.

"FRÉRON."

It is evident that the austere Fréron is determined to preserve his liberty of criticism unshackled; we find it in that condition in his account of "Eugénie," which is severe, but conscientious and judicious.

This first success was altogether sufficiently flattering to encourage Beaumarchais to persist in a course which was not precisely one for which he was fitted by nature. Happily for him, his second attempt was a failure, and diverted his attention for a time from the "serious style." This second drama of his was also inspired by an idea of Diderot, to this effect: that the representation of social situations should be substituted for the representation of character, and that all social situations are almost equally available for dramatic purposes. According to this erroneous principle, Beaumarchais conceived the notion of two friends living together, one of whom, Mélac, was a receiver of taxes; the other, Aurelly, being a Lyons merchant. Aurelly has to take up a bill, for which he is expecting funds from Paris; Mélac, who hears that the desired funds are not forthcoming, and who sees that his friend may have to suspend payment, takes all the money which has been paid to him as receiver of taxes, and places it in Aurelly's cash-box without the knowledge of the latter, who is made to believe that these are the funds he was expecting from Paris. At this juncture appears a farmer-general, who is going his rounds, and calls upon Mélac for his receipts. Throughout two acts, the latter persists in passing for a thief who has made away with the funds intrusted to him; and as the honest Aurelly is ignorant that the money which had been intrusted to Mélac is in his cash-box, he unites with the farmer-general to overwhelm his heroic friend with re-

proaches, until at last all is discovered, and the farmer-general, an impressionable and romantic man, undertakes to arrange every thing.

It was in vain that, by way of softening the harshness of such a subject, Beaumarchais introduced the somewhat graceful episode of the loves of Pauline and M^{el}ac's son; a few brilliant and pathetic scenes could not save this too commercial drama of "The Two Friends." Played for the first time January 13, 1770, it lingered until the tenth representation, which was the last. As the author had, to use his own expression, the advantage over "his unfortunate brothers of the pen" of being able to go to the theatre in a carriage, and made, perhaps, too great a parade of this advantage, the result was that his failure was received with a great many jokes. It was said that, at the end of the first representation, a wag in the pit cried out, "This is all an affair of bankruptcy; I am down for my twenty sous." Some days afterward, Beaumarchais having had the imprudence to say to Sophie Arnould, in reference to an opera called "Zoroaster," which was not successful, "In a week you will have no one, or nearly so," the witty actress replied to him, "Your 'Friends' will bring us some." To conclude, the capital defect of "The Two Friends" was summed up in this quatrain of the period, cited by Grimm:

"I've seen Beaumarchais' piece: it's so absurd,
I'll tell you all about it in a word.
While capital is worked in every way,
There's naught like interest throughout the play."

However, in January, 1770, Beaumarchais could easily console himself for the failure of a drama; he was rich, busy, and happy. Between the production of "Eugénie" and that of "The Two Friends," he had contrived to make himself loved by the young and beautiful widow of a garde-général named Lévêque; and in April, 1768, he married this Madame Lévêque, formerly Geneviève Madeleine Watebled, who brought him a brilliant fortune. With the co-operation of Paris du Verney, he purchased from the state a large portion of the Forest of Chinon, out of which he made money; and he was

still more occupied in selling wood* than in writing dramas. In a letter of this period, dated from a village in Touraine, he appears to us as a dealer in wood, intelligent, active, fond of scenery, and with a touch of rural poetry which one would scarcely expect to find in him; for his works, which are all redolent of the air of Paris, do not offer the least trace of such a sentiment. The letter is addressed to his second wife.

"You request me to write to you, my dear love. I will do so with all my heart; it will be most agreeable recreation, after the labor I have been forced to undergo during my stay in this village. Misunderstandings between directors, who had to be reconciled; complaints and petitions which had to be attended to from clerks; an account to go over of more than 100,000 crowns, broken up into claims of 20 and 30 sous, and from which the cashier, who is liable for it, must be relieved; the different harbors to visit; to see 200 of the workmen in the forest, and examine their work; to arrange the preparation and transport of 280 acres of wood, which is already cut; to construct new roads from the forest to the river, and repair the old ones; to stow away three or four hundred thousand measures of hay; to get a provision of oats for thirty dray-horses; to buy thirty more horses for six more wagons, in order to take away all our wood for the navy before winter; gates and sluices to construct on the River Indre, so as to provide us with water during the whole year, in the place where the wood is embarked; 50 barges waiting for their cargoes to start off for Tours, Saumur, Angers, and Nantes; to sign the leases for seven or eight farms, which altogether supply the provisions of a household of thirty persons; the general account of our receipts and disbursements during two years to regulate. Such, my dear wife, is briefly the amount of my labors, a portion of which I have terminated, while I am getting on with the rest."

After two more pages of similar details, Beaumarchais concludes with this graceful and animated picture of rural life:†

"You see, my dear love, we do not sleep here so much as at Pantin; but the active work to which I am forced does not displease me. Since arriving in this retreat, inaccessible as it is to vanity, I have seen none but natural, simple-minded persons, such as I often wish to be myself. I live in my offices, which I have established in a good countrified farm, between the poultry-yard and the kitchen garden,

* La Harpe was completely deceived when he stated generally that "this speculation in wood could not be carried out." Beaumarchais sold the wood of the Forest of Chinon for many years.

† His wife was at this time installed in a country-house at Pantin.

and surrounded by a green hedge. My bed-room, which has no upholstery beyond the whitewash on the walls, is furnished with an indifferent bed, in which I sleep like a top; four rush-bottomed chairs, an oaken table, a large fireplace without mantelpiece or any thing else; but from the window, as I write to you, I see all the meadows and plains of the valley which I inhabit filled with robust men of bronzed complexion, who are cutting and carrying off fodder with their teams of oxen; a multitude of women and girls, with rakes on their shoulders or in their hands, are filling the air as they work with their lively songs, which I hear from my table; through the trees in the distance I see the winding stream of the Indre, and an ancient chateau flanked by its towers, which belongs to my neighbor, Madame de Roncée. The whole scene is crowned by the tufted summits of the trees, which increase in number until they are lost on the crests of the heights which surround us, so that they form a large spherical framework round the horizon, which they shut out on all sides. This picture is not without its charms. Coarse, wholesome bread, dishes which are more than simple, with execrable wine, form my diet. Really, if I could venture to wish you such a misfortune as to be in want of every thing in a desolate country, I should regret exceedingly not to have you with me. Adieu, my love. If you think these details can amuse our good friends and relations, I leave you at liberty to read them together one evening by yourselves. Kiss them all into the bargain; and now good-night; I am going to bed. But my son, my son, how is he? I laugh when I think I am working for him."

The kind and affectionate nature which is exhibited in this letter was soon put to a severe test. When he had been married less than three years, Beaumarchais lost his second wife, who died on the 21st November, 1770, after childbirth. Calumniators did not fail to say that there was something strange in his thus losing his second wife, and that it tended to confirm the rumors which had been circulated as to the death of the first. There was certainly one little difficulty about the hypothesis: at least half the fortune of his second wife consisted in an annuity. Beaumarchais had thus the greatest interest in her life; besides, she left him a child; but these foul anecdote-mongers were not so particular as to details. However, when the son himself died two years after his mother, October 17, 1772, the calumniators were afraid to be logical; they did not think, says La Harpe, of insinuating that he had also poisoned his child.

Such, then, was the situation of Beaumarchais in 1771. As a private individual, he had once more passed from opulence to a position which was far from being brilliant; as a writer, he had not yet attained reputation. The flattering though ephemeral success of his first drama had been effaced by the failure of the second. The great body of the public only considered him as a sentimental and ponderous dramatist of the Diderot school; no one yet saw in him the future author of the "Barber of Seville;" and the following account, which Palissot gave of him in a satire of the period, was thought to be true enough:

"Beaumarchais, too obscure to be interesting,
Of Diderot, his God, is the powerless ape."*

Just then a lawsuit, which seemed calculated to have no other result than that of dishonoring and ruining him, was the origin of another which appeared destined to crush him completely, and the effect of which was to exhibit all the comic power which nature had gifted him with, to replace him on the road to an immense fortune, and to make him for a time the most celebrated and popular man of his country and age.

CHAPTER VIII.

Beaumarchais and his Lawsuits.—The Count de la Blache.—An ingenious Advocate.—The disputed Document.—Death of Beaumarchais' second Wife.—An Indiscretion.—The "Barber of Seville."

THE first of the great lawsuits, which were destined to give a new course to Beaumarchais' life, lasted seven years. In the first place won, then lost, and afterward won again, it placed the author of "Eugénie" in a position to suffer from all kinds of enmity and persecution. The famous action against Goëzman arose out of this grave affair, the circumstances of which have hitherto been somewhat incorrectly narrated. It is desirable to give the true facts of the case, to show that it was not simply an affair of money, as La Harpe states, and to explain why the Prince de Conti said, not without reason, in reference to the contest, "Beaumarchais must be either paid

* "Beaumarchais, trop obscur pour être intéressant,
De son dieu Diderot est le singe impuissant."

or hanged," which made Beaumarchais reply: "But if I gain my suit, do you not think that my adversary ought to pay *cordially* himself?" The reader remembers how old Paris du Verney, ex-commissary-general, founder and director of the Military School, had become attached to the protégé of the princesses, had advised him, assisted him in making his way at court by lending him money to buy appointments, and had given him a share in various commercial operations, so as to enable him to pay back the money he had lent him. Owing to this connection, both in friendship and business, which lasted ten years, during which period Beaumarchais was often intrusted by Du Verney with important negotiations, and which finally brought about the partnership into which they entered, with a view of purchasing the Forest of Chinon, large sums of money had passed between them, of which no account had been drawn up in a regular manner. Beaumarchais, in consequence of the great age of Du Verney, and fearing to be involved in a lawsuit with his heirs, on several occasions asked him, in a very pressing manner, to go over the accounts. He did so at last, on the first of April, 1770, by means of a duplicate document, sealed on each side, by which, after a long enumeration of the debtor and creditor accounts of each of the contracting parties, Beaumarchais restored to Du Verney 160,000 francs in his own bills, and agreed to the dissolution of their partnership in the Forest of Chinon. On his part, Du Verney declared that Beaumarchais owed him nothing, acknowledged himself his debtor to the amount of 15,000 francs, payable to him on demand, and bound himself to lend him the sum of 75,000 francs for eight years, without interest. These two clauses had not yet been fulfilled when Du Verney died, July 17, 1770, at 87 years of age, leaving a fortune of about 1,500,000 francs. Having no relations but nephews and grand-nephews, he had chosen for his sole legatee one of his grand-nephews by the female side, who had been brought up under his care, and who, through his interest, had become Maréchal-de-Camp. This was the Count de la Blache. The Count de la Blache had long said of Beaumarchais, "I hate this man as a lover loves his mistress." La Harpe, who was not well acquainted with the facts, appears to have been astonished at

this hatred, and brings it forward as one of the singular things in Beaumarchais' life. There was, however, nothing singular about it; first of all, it was natural enough that an heir presumptive should not have any great fancy for a person who had received and might still receive benefits from an old man whose fortune he looked upon as his own. In the next place, the Count de la Blache had private motives for disliking Beaumarchais. Beaumarchais was very intimate with another nephew of Paris du Verney's by the male side, M. Paris de Meyzieu, a distinguished man, who had aided his uncle materially in founding the *Ecole Militaire*, but who was not so clever in the art, so difficult and painful to noble dispositions, of securing an inheritance, and retired from all contest, allowing himself to be sacrificed to a more distant relation. Beaumarchais, considering this unfair, had never ceased to combat the weakness of his old friend Du Verney, and to take the part of M. de Meyzieu with a frankness and activity which are proved by his letters, from which I will only quote one fragment, written in reference to the settlement of the accounts in question.

"I can not bear the idea," he writes to Du Verney, March 9, 1770, "of being placed, in case of your death, in relation with M. le Comte de la Blache, whom I respect with all my heart, but who, since I have met him at Madame d'Hauteville's house, has never done me the honor to bow to me. You make him your heir: I have nothing to say about that; but if, in case of the greatest misfortune which could happen to me, I am to be his debtor, I must decline any arrangement; I shall not dissolve the partnership. Put me in a position to act with my friend Meyzieu, who is a gallant and honorable man, and to whom, my dear friend, you have long owed some reparation. An uncle does not offer apologies to his nephew, but acts of kindness, and above all of assistance, when he feels that he has acted wrongly toward him. I have never disguised from him my opinion on the subject. Let me be accountable to him. This souvenir, which you will leave him when he least expects it, will fill his heart with a gratitude worthy of such a favor. To conclude, this is all I can say: you, or in default of you, Meyzieu, or no dissolution of partnership.* I have other reasons for laying a stress upon this point, but I will communicate

* Referring to Du Verney's wish to dissolve the partnership in reference to the Forest of Chinon, to which Beaumarchais gave his consent, but only on certain conditions.

them to you orally. When shall we see one another? for I give you notice that until then I shall do nothing in the matter."

It will be easily understood that Beaumarchais' partiality for the rejected nephew was little calculated to gain the friendship of the favored one. The Count de la Blache detested him, then, cordially; and when, after the death of Du Verney, Beaumarchais sent his settlement of accounts to him, and summoned him to act upon the document, he replied that he did not recognize his uncle's signature, and that he looked upon the document as a forgery. When challenged to make an accusation of forgery, by way of avoiding the consequences of a failure in so dangerous an action, he declared that he reserved to himself the right of taking this step, and, in the mean while, called upon the tribunals to annul the statement of accounts, as containing internal evidence of fraud, so that Beaumarchais found himself taken in the meshes of the most odious snare; for, while he dared not accuse him openly of forgery, the Count de la Blache continued to plead indirectly the commission of the act; and yet, after the question had been argued with all the stigma attached to it, he wished to turn against Beaumarchais the very deed he declared to be forged. Then, not satisfied with claiming from him the payment of 53,500 livres of debts, which were marked down in Du Verney's papers, and annulled by the said statement of accounts—since, in the statement of accounts, Beaumarchais carried to Du Verney's account not 53,500 livres, but 139,000 livres, an increase which was compensated for by a more considerable one upon Du Verney—his adversary demanded, with naïveté, that the pretended forgery should only have the effect of annulling Beaumarchais' claim on Du Verney, while it left intact the entire claim of 139,000 livres of Du Verney upon Beaumarchais, which could only be allowed on the supposition that the statement of accounts was genuine. Hence it followed that Beaumarchais, instead of receiving 15,000 livres, which the document in question entitled him to, would have to pay 139,000 livres, from which it liberated him. "Thus," said Maître Caillard, the very ingenious and very insulting advocate selected by the Count de la Blache, "thus justice will be avenged, and honest citizens will be satisfied, when they see such an ad-

versary taken in his own snares." This civil way of taking advantage of a document declared to be a forgery, and transforming a claim of 53,500 francs into a debt of 139,000 francs, already seems to indicate more ingenuity than good faith on the part of Du Verney's legatee, or at least on that of his counsel. But, as I did not undertake this book in the character of Beaumarchais' advocate, and wished to be acquainted with all the documents relating to this lawsuit, I procured, with some trouble, all the memorials of the Count de la Blache's advocate, and read them, together with the answers of Beaumarchais. I have before me the original of this famous statement of accounts, which had traveled from the Parliament of Paris to the Parliament of Aix, and which, during seven years, had been subjected to the inspection of so many judges and so many advocates that it had become necessary to keep it together by means of strips of paper pasted along the sides. In providing myself with all the documents calculated to enlighten me on the subject, my object was to ascertain exactly, not whether Beaumarchais ought or ought not to have received the 15,000 francs which he claimed—that being of but little importance to posterity—but whether he was an audacious forger, or an honest man undeservedly calumniated, which was far more important. I might, strictly speaking, have dispensed with this fatiguing inquiry; for, after all, Beaumarchais, after gaining his action on the first trial, and losing it on an appeal, through circumstances which will be explained, obtained a reversal of the latter decision, and a final judgment from the Parliament of Provence, dated July 21, 1778. This judgment gave all the points in his favor, declared the statement of accounts perfectly valid, ordered the Count de la Blache to execute it in its integrity, and, moreover, ordered him to pay the expenses of the action, and 12,000 francs damages for the calumny he had uttered. The question, then, was completely settled, and I might have trusted to the final judgment of the Parliament of Provence; but it was enough that so injurious a suspicion should have been hanging over Beaumarchais' head for seven years, it was enough that this prolonged calumny should have left its fatal trace in his life, which we shall meet with more than once, for me to feel it necessary to obtain a

complete conviction for myself with regard to so grave a point.

First of all, as to the question of probability. Was it probable that in April, 1770, Beaumarchais, possessing a certain fortune of his own, and, moreover, enjoying the wealth brought to him by his second wife, who was still alive (it may be remembered that she only died on the 21st of November of the same year), was it probable that in this position Beaumarchais would have run the risk of forging a document in order to avoid paying to Du Verney's heir 53,500 francs, and to obtain from him 15,000 francs, particularly when he knew beforehand that this heir, who was a man of quality, a *Maréchal-de-Camp*, possessing great interest and great fortune, hated him with all his heart, and would neglect nothing to ruin him if he could do so? There is already something in this which shocks all probability.

Supposing now that Beaumarchais had wished, and had been able to forge this document, would he have given it the form this one had? It is a large double sheet of paper, of the kind known as "*à la Tellière*;" the very complicated details of the statement, written in Beaumarchais' own hand, fill the two first pages; at the end of the second page it is signed on the right by Beaumarchais, and on the left, dated and signed by Du Verney. The third page contains a *résumé* in figures of the general terms of this statement. What did the Count de la Blache's advocate say of this document? He discussed it with all an advocate's case; at one time he insinuated that the signature of Du Verney was a forgery; at another, when called upon to make the accusation of forgery, he declared that if it was genuine it had been signed at a period anterior to the date of 1770; "a period at which," he said, "old Du Verney's hand was tremulous, while the signature at the foot of this document was written boldly, and by a hand which must have been firm and light." Here the advocate pretended not to see what was staring him in the face—that above the signature of Du Verney, written in the same ink, and the same handwriting, were the words, "Paris, April 1, 1770." That is to say, Du Verney had not only signed, but dated the deed in question, which necessitated the hypoth-

esis that he was in the habit of amusing himself, either in his youth or at an advanced age, by signing blank documents and dating them beforehand, so as to have them ready for the close of his life. Defeated on this point, the advocate then insinuated that this large double sheet of paper must be a blank document, signed and dated by Du Verney, without doubt in 1770, but for an entirely different object; and that it had afterward been abstracted and filled up by Beaumarchais. Now what likelihood was there that Du Verney—whose methodic habits were moreover brought against Beaumarchais—would have left lying about his house, with no stated object, stamped documents, signed exactly at the end of the second page of a large sheet of paper “à la Tellière,” and, moreover, signed, not in the middle of the paper, but on the left, precisely so as to keep a place on the right for a second signature? What likelihood, in fine, was there that Beaumarchais—against whom it was argued, on the other hand, that during the latter days of Du Verney’s life he could scarcely ever get near him (which was true)—had managed to arrive just at the moment for abstracting a stamped document, prepared in the above strange manner? Feeling the weakness of his argument, Beaumarchais’ adversary fell back upon the contents of the document in question. He could prove without trouble that its clauses were complicated, diffuse, sometimes even mixed one with another, and that it contained matters not relating in any way to the statement of accounts. This was true; but it told precisely in favor of Beaumarchais; for if he had been able or willing to forge the document, he would have made it either shorter or more methodic, instead of which, as he was arranging a long series of operations with an old man of eighty-seven, the statement had naturally exhibited something of the old man’s prolix and whimsical nature.*

* The advocate attempted to explain the prolixity of the style in which the document was written by saying that the person who prepared it, having abstracted the stamped document, had to fill up two pages in order to reach as far as Du Verney’s signature; but, if Beaumarchais had been capable of such an action, as the table of figures on the third page of the double sheet in no way contributed to the validity of the statement of accounts, nothing would have prevented him from

But it will be said, if Beaumarchais had only such feeble arguments to reply to, how, after gaining this action on the first trial, could he have lost it on the appeal? Without speaking here of the influence of Goëzman, who had to prepare the report, we shall afterward find another councilor of the Maupeou Parliament acknowledge formally, in a letter to Beaumarchais, that the rumors publicly circulated about him had influenced him much in his decision. It must, however, be added, for the sake of correctness, that there were some circumstances connected with this lawsuit which were calculated to make a certain impression upon judges who were already strongly prejudiced; for instance, if the reader has followed us with attention, he will, doubtless, already have inquired what had become of the duplicate of the statement of accounts between Beaumarchais and Du Verney; it is here that the adversary of Beaumarchais thought to triumph over him when he exclaimed, "This document, written entirely by yourself, is supposed to have been executed in duplicate between you and Du Verney; now no duplicate has been found among the papers of the deceased, consequently no duplicate ever existed, and consequently the deed you present is a forgery." To this Beaumarchais replied, "In consequence of the difficulties which you, his suspicious and avaricious heir, occasioned in my interviews with Du Verney toward the close of his life, we could scarcely ever meet, except almost in secret. After a long consultation in writing on the subject of our accounts, I sent him the duplicates of the deed which he had commissioned me to draw up, both of them bearing my signature: he sent me back one of the two, after signing it and dating it himself, and kept the other. If the other one was not to be found among his papers, he had destroyed it or lost it, or you yourself, who never left the room of the deceased, abstracted it before the inventory was made, in order that it might not be used in corroboration of the one I now present to you. As for me, I prove the truth and genuineness of this deed, not only by the deed itself, but by sever-
taking a single sheet and writing the deed on the very page which bore Du Verney's signature at the extremity; he would thus have only had one page to fill up.

eral letters from Du Verney, which I also present to you, the authenticity of which I defy you to disprove, and which are all in reply to questions I had addressed to him with regard to this statement of accounts, and to which he replied with his own hand, without any delay, and upon the very sheet of paper which contained the question, according to our habit of corresponding during ten years; I even present you one of these letters, in which Du Verney writes to me, 'Now the transaction is signed.' What can you reply to this?"

Maitre Caillard, the advocate of Count de la Blache, was not to be upset so easily. "This," he said, "is a further proof of M. de Beaumarchais' fraud; the letters with which we are confronted are perhaps in Du Verney's handwriting, but they are short, vague, without importance; they are not dated; they were written at another time, and about some other subject; and the pretended questions, with their dates, to which they are supposed to be answers, were indorsed afterward on the same sheet by M. de Beaumarchais. As for the letter in which Du Verney writes, 'The transaction is now settled,' it alludes to some other transaction."

An examination of the letters destroyed so damaging an interpretation; for Du Verney's answers, although naturally less explicit than Beaumarchais' questions, all of which applied to the statement of accounts, could have reference to no other questions; for some of them are not "endorsed" one upon the other, that is to say, one written on the first and one on the third page of the sheet, but both are on the same page, Du Verney's answer being immediately after Beaumarchais' question, which rendered the frauds imagined by the advocate impossible. And, finally, if these answers of Du Verney's did not refer to Beaumarchais' questions, which were supposed to have been written afterward, they must have referred to other questions and other letters of Beaumarchais, which ought to have been found among Du Verney's papers. Why, then, did not the opponent present them, as he presented all the letters from Beaumarchais to Du Verney from which he thought he could get any advantage? Such is the true view of the deplorable lawsuit which Beaumarchais had to carry on for so long a time, obliged as he was either to gain it or to pass for a

forger. All that was singular in the affair, that is to say, the absence of the duplicate of the deed in question; the slightly confused style in which it was drawn up; the somewhat mysterious character of the correspondence between Du Verney and Beaumarchais, which the latter brought forward in support of this deed; finally, the disappearance from among Du Verney's papers of every document relating to this statement of accounts—all these circumstances might have been explained naturally enough by unprejudiced judges in regard to a man who had been less calumniated, and who was at issue with an adversary of less power, in the following manner: An old man of eighty-seven, settling with a friend, who was detested by his heir, certain affairs which he did not choose to submit to this heir, had naturally gone to work in a somewhat mysterious manner, while the heir himself was interested in increasing the mystery rather than in dissipating it.

Under the circumstances, these facts, when made use of, and distorted by a venomous and quibbling advocate, assumed a sufficiently black appearance to account for the apostrophe which Beaumarchais in his anger addressed to certain pleaders: "Oh! what a contemptible trade is that exercised by a man who, to gain the money of another, makes disgraceful efforts to dishonor a third, alters facts without shame, distorts meanings, adduces authorities which he quotes incorrectly, and sports with falsehood and perjury." In the mean while, this action, which was commenced on October 17, 1771, before the lower court, then known as that of the *requêtes de l'hôtel*,* was first of all decided in favor of Beaumarchais. The first judgment, dated February 22, 1772, refused the Count de la Blache's petition for rescinding the agreement between Du Verney and Beaumarchais, while a second judgment, dated March 14, 1772, ordered that the statement of accounts alleged to be forged should be acted upon. This adversary made an appeal to the High Chamber of Parliament.

Although victorious in the first contest, Beaumarchais suffered much from it. The advocate Caillard had calumniated him outrageously, while the animosity and influence of the

* Corresponding to our now obsolete title, "Court of Requests."—
TRANS.

Count de la Blache raised all the herd of pamphleteers against him. As the death of his second wife happened to take place while this melancholy debate was going on, it was made use of as a pretext for the atrocious calumnies of which I have already spoken. These calumnies were circulated in the foreign papers, and in those manuscript sheets which supplied in so detestable a manner the place of a free press. They found a ready hearing from all those persons who are annoyed at the high position of a man who has made his own way, above all when this man is not modest about it; and it is quite certain that Beaumarchais was not. Not content with destroying his reputation, the Count de la Blache, whom he speaks of somewhere as the author of all his misfortunes, had just surprised him, and given him a coward's thrust under the following circumstances: For a few days before the judgment of the lower court was pronounced, Beaumarchais, learning that his adversary was spreading his report every where that the princesses had driven him from their presence for dishonorable actions, had written to the Countess de Perigord, first lady in waiting to the Princess Victoire, to complain of the count's calumnies, and to ask the princesses to bear witness to his honesty and honor. The Countess de Perigord had replied to him immediately by the following letter:

“Versailles, Feb. 12, 1772.

“I have informed Madame Victoire, sir, of the contents of your letter, and she assures me *that she never said a word to any one which could injure your reputation, not knowing any thing concerning you which could lead her to do so.* She has desired me to communicate this to you. The princess even added that she was well aware you were engaged in a lawsuit, but that what she said about you could never do you any harm in any case, particularly in a lawsuit, and that you might be at rest upon this point.

“I am delighted that this opportunity, &c.,

“T. COMTESSE DE PERIGORD.”

Instead of publishing this letter literally, which was quite sufficient to maintain his honor, Beaumarchais, in order to make as much as possible out of it, had the imprudence to embody it in a note to one of his Memorials against the Count de la Blache, in which he said that, as his adversary had endeavored to “deprive him of the flattering protection which

Mesdames had always granted him," and had whispered to the judges that he had rendered himself unworthy of their kindness, and that they "no longer took any sort of interest in him," he was authorized by Madame Victoire to publish, &c., &c. Here Beaumarchais gave an exact and faithful *résumé* of the Countess de Perigord's letter, but the commentary which preceded it was both unbecoming and rash. He thus laid himself open to his adversaries, for he seemed to wish to make the princesses say more than they really had said, and to transform a simple mark of esteem, a simple certificate of his honesty, into an engagement to use their influence and interest on his behalf with regard to his lawsuit, which was necessarily offensive to princesses who were conscious of their duties. He had scarcely committed this blunder when the Count de la Blache hurried to Versailles, procured admission to the princesses' presence, and complained to them that Beaumarchais had made an unworthy use of their name to the detriment of a Maréchal-de-Camp, and that, in a printed Memorial, he had had the audacity to affirm that the princesses took the most lively interest in the success of his suit. Beaumarchais had not said that, but it has just been seen that, in speaking of "interest" and "protection," he might be accused of endeavoring to let that be understood. The princesses were irritated, and the Count de la Blache, taking advantage of this, procured from them the following little *billet-doux*:

"We declare that we take no interest in M. Caron de Beaumarchais and his lawsuit, and we have not given him permission to state, in a printed and public Memorial, that he enjoys our protection.

"MARIE-ADELAIDE, VICTOIRE-LOUISE,

"SOPHIE-PHILIPPINE, ELISABETH-JUSTINE.

"Versailles, Feb. 15, 1772."

This declaration, which was immediately afterward printed and published by the Count de la Blache, circulated every where. If it did not prevent the judges, who had seen the Countess de Perigord's letter, from doing justice to Beaumarchais, although they ordered the suppression of the indiscreet note which he had been guilty of publishing, the public were completely deceived by it, in whose eyes the author of the note appeared not only as a man who had been guilty of an

indiscretion, in commenting on and amplifying a perfectly genuine expression of esteem, but as a double impostor, who, to support a false statement of accounts, produced a false certificate of honesty. To complete his misfortune, Beaumarchais, feeling that he had done wrong in thus commenting on and exaggerating the support given him by the Princess Victoire, and fearing to offend her by maintaining the truth, did not dare to publish the Countess de Perigord's letter, which explained his commentary, and found himself obliged to remain silent under the effects of the suspected imposition.* Things were in this state; the action was going on in appeal; Beaumarchais, struggling as best he could against an adversary of influence and his own bad reputation, was gaining some repose from this war of quibbles by writing "The Barber of Seville," when an incident, as strange as it was unexpected, occurred to complete the embarrassment of his situation, and to supply fresh food for the malice of his enemies.

CHAPTER IX.

Madame Ménard.—A Portrait by Grimm.—A jealous Duke.—The Rivals.—The Duke attacks Gudin.—The Duke attacks Beaumarchais.

THE details of the incident which is now coming under our notice are completely unknown to the public. In his notice of Beaumarchais, La Harpe contents himself with saying that he had a quarrel with a nobleman who wished to take a courtesan away from him. The name is rather a hard one for Mademoiselle Ménard, with whom we are to make acquaint-

* It was not until two years afterward that he determined to reply. In December, 1773, when the lawsuit was going on which the Councilor Goëzman instituted against him, and which will soon come under our notice, Beaumarchais found himself accused again, by this judge, of having invented a testimonial from the Princess Victoire. Goëzman here acted in bad faith, for he knew of the Countess de Perigord's letter, and pretended to be ignorant of it. It was only then that Beaumarchais published this letter, endeavoring, with much skill, to palliate his conduct in making such an indiscreet use of it. I have just explained, with much exactness, in what this indiscretion consisted, and how the Count de la Blache managed to profit by it.

ance, and who was not *precisely* what La Harpe calls her. In his edition of the works of Beaumarchais, which has been made the model of all the others, Gudin, reserving the narrative of his friend's quarrel with the Duke de Chaulnes for his Memoirs, which remained unpublished, only printed the two most vague and insignificant of all the letters relating to the affair in question.

In the mean while the author of "The Barber of Seville" had carefully collected all the papers relating to this strange affair. The packet which contains them is quite complete; it is one of those on which he has written, with his own hand, "Materials for the Memoirs of my own Life;" and as the adventure had occasioned the commencement of judicial proceedings before M. de Sartines, then Lieutenant-general of Police, Beaumarchais, who afterward became rather intimately acquainted with him, induced him to give back all the letters and depositions of each of those actors who had appeared in this tragi-comic scene. I shall endeavor, then, to reproduce it as it actually occurred, leaving the characters as much as possible to speak in their own words. These pictures of manners, when they are minute and authentic, throw much more light on the character of a period than the most pompous generalities. Let us, first of all, say a word about the amiable person who was the cause of so many combats between Beaumarchais, skillful and prudent as Ulysses, and a duke and peer of France, strong and impetuous as Ajax. Mademoiselle Ménard was a young and pretty, if not virtuous *artiste*, who in June, 1770, had appeared with much success at the Italian Theatre, in Madame Laruelle's parts; she had, above all, distinguished herself in that of Louise in "The Deserter." Grimm has given us her portrait. "It is agreed generally enough," he says, in his "Literary Correspondence," "that she played the part of Louise better than any of our most favorite actresses, and that she introduced *nuances* into the character which were missed by Madame Laruelle and Madame Trial. She had less success in the other parts; and it may be said that she played with an unevenness which was really surprising. She has gained many supporters; authors, poets, and musicians are in her interest, in spite of which M. le Maréchal de Richelieu,

kislar-aga of the amusements of the public, that is to say, of plays,* does not wish her to be engaged even on trial. He knows better than we do what we like to have for our money. Mademoiselle Ménard's voice is of mediocre quality, and she has had a bad singing-master. With a better system, and the power of regulating her voice, she may be able to sing sufficiently well not to injure the effect of her acting. As regards the latter, she has first of all the advantages of an easy delivery and a natural pronunciation. She does not speak from the head, and in *alto* tones, like Madame Laruelle and Madame Trial. Her face is that of a handsome girl, but not of a pleasing actress. Put Mademoiselle Ménard, with her freshness, youth, and piquancy, down to supper by the side of Mademoiselle Arnould, and the latter will appear a skeleton in comparison; but on the stage this skeleton will be graceful, distinguished, and charming, while the fresh and piquante Ménard will look like a slut (*gaupe*).† Her head appears to be rather large; and her cheek-bones are rather too high, which impedes the play of the countenance. A great deal has been said about the beauty of her arms; they are very white, but too short; they look like lions' paws; her face generally is rather too large and strongly marked‡ for the naïve, ingenious, gentle heroines, such as the majority of those of our *opéras comiques*.§ For the rest, I am of the opinion of the public that Mademoiselle Ménard ought to be received on trial; she appears capable of being made very useful. It is said that she was in the first instance a flower-girl on the *boulevards*, but that, wishing to abandon this calling, which has

* In his capacity of first gentleman of the King's Chamber.

† I must apologize to readers who are delicate in the choice of their expressions for quoting some of Grimm's words literally. They have, however, an historic importance; above all, when we remember that Grimm's articles formed the delight of a sufficiently large number of German princes and princesses, who paid considerable prices for them.

‡ This portrait of Grimm's will be rather modified directly by a worthy abbé, who tells us that gentleness was the distinct characteristic of Mademoiselle Ménard's physiognomy.

§ An *opéra comique* is any opera in which spoken dialogue occurs, and can not, therefore, be rendered by "comic opera." The French version of the "*Sonnambula*," for instance, in which most of the recitative is omitted, is entitled "*Opéra Comique*."—TRANS.

rather degenerated from its original importance at the period when Glycera sold bouquets at the gates of the Athenian Temples, she purchased Restaut's Grammar, and applied herself to the study of the French grammar and pronunciation, after which she tried her powers of acting. One thing is certain, that during her *débuts* she applied to all the authors, whether composers or poets, in order to obtain their advice and profit by their intelligence, and this with a zeal and docility which have been rewarded by the applause she has received in her different parts. M. de Péquigny, now Duke de Chaulnes, the protector of her charms, has had her portrait painted by Greuze, so that, if we do not keep her on the stage, we shall, at all events, see her at the next exhibition."*

The protection of the Duke de Chaulnes having doubtless prevented Mademoiselle Ménard from being protected by the Duke de Richelieu, she sacrificed her hopes of success to the jealousy of the first of these two dukes, and renounced the stage; but, as she was witty and agreeable, she received very distinguished guests (of the male sex, it must be understood), Marmontel, Sedaine, Rulhières Chamfort, together with the highest nobles, who were brought there by the Duke de Chaulnes. This duke, who was then thirty, was already notorious for the violence and eccentricity of his disposition. He was the last representative of the younger branch of the house of Luynes, which I think became extinct in his person. Gudin's unpublished manuscript contains some details about him, which are corroborated by all contemporaneous evidence. "His disposition," writes Gudin, "was a strange mixture of good qualities and defects of the most opposite nature. Wit without judgment; pride, and yet such a deficiency in discernment as to deprive him of the consciousness of his own dignity in his relations with his superiors, his equals, or his inferiors; a vast but ill-regulated memory; a great desire to acquire knowledge, and a still greater taste for dissipation; prodigious physical strength; a violence of temper which interfered with his reason, in itself always sufficiently confused; liability to fits of passion, in which he resembled a drunken savage, not to say a wild beast; always giving himself up to the impres-

* Correspondance Littéraire.

sion of the moment, without reference to the consequences, he had got himself into more than one dilemma; banished from the kingdom for five years, he had employed the period of his exile in a scientific journey; he had visited the Pyramids, associated with the Bedouins of the desert, brought back many objects of natural history and an unhappy monkey, which he overwhelmed with blows every day."* The Duke de Chaulnes' temper rendered his *liaison* with Mademoiselle Ménard a very quarrelsome one; jealous, unfaithful, and violent, he had for some time inspired her with no other feeling than that of fear, when he suddenly took a great fancy to Beaumarchais, and introduced him to his mistress. At the end of some months, he perceived that she preferred Beaumarchais to him: his love changed to anger; Mademoiselle Ménard, frightened by his violence, begged Beaumarchais to discontinue his visits. Out of regard to her, he consented to do so; but as the duke still continued his ill treatment, she became desperate, and took refuge in a convent. When she considered she had regained her liberty by a final rupture, she returned to her house, inviting Beaumarchais to come and see her.

Beaumarchais, although the duke did not authorize his visits, appears to have profited by the permission given him by Mademoiselle Ménard to recommence calling upon her. At last, one fine morning, February 11, 1773, the Duke de Chaulnes took it into his head to kill his rival. As the following scene lasted an entire day, and as each of the actors who took part in it made his deposition in writing before the Lieutenant of Police or the Tribunal of the Marshals of

* We may add to this portrait of Gudin that the Duke de Chaulnes, in the midst of his disorderly and extravagant life, had preserved some of his father's tastes, who was a distinguished *savant* in mechanics, physics, and natural history, and who died an honorary member of the Academy of Sciences. The son was passionately fond of chemistry, and made some discoveries in relation to it. Still, even in this kind of occupation he was remarkable for the eccentricity of his disposition. Thus, in order to test the efficacy of a preparation he had invented against asphyxia, he shut himself up in a glass closet calculated to induce asphyxia, leaving to his valet the task of coming to his succor from time to time, and trying the effect of his remedy upon him. Luckily, he had an attentive servant, who did not let him go too far.

France as regarded his own share in the transaction, I will compare the different depositions, commencing with that of Gudin, who saw the commencement of the storm. In the unpublished narrative which he prepared of the whole affair thirty-five years after the event, Gudin colors a little. I prefer his deposition, as made at that time: he appears more natural in it. We see that he is young, good-natured, devoted to Beaumarchais, with whom he had been acquainted some time, and who had, doubtless, introduced him to Made-moiselle Ménard, but very susceptible, not very warlike, and much afraid of compromising himself.

*Report made to the Lieutenant of Police of what happened to me
on Thursday, February 11.*

“On Thursday, at eleven in the morning, I went to Madame Ménard’s, after having been to several places. ‘It is a long while since I have seen you,’ she said; ‘I thought you no longer cared for me.’ I assured her of the contrary, and took a seat in an arm-chair by the side of her bed. She burst into tears, and, unable to contain her grief, told me how much she had had to suffer from the violence of the Duke de Chaulnes. She afterward spoke to me of an accusation made against M. de Beaumarchais. The duke entered; I rose, bowed to him, and gave him my place by the side of the bed. ‘I am crying,’ said Madame Ménard, ‘and begging M. Gudin to induce M. de Beaumarchais to justify himself from the ridiculous accusation made against him.’ ‘What necessity is there,’ replied the duke, ‘for justifying a scoundrel like Beaumarchais?’ ‘He is a very honest man,’ she replied, shedding fresh tears. ‘You love him,’ cried the duke, rising. ‘You humiliate me; and I declare I will go out and fight with him.’ There was, in the room where we were, a friend of Madame Ménard’s, a servant, or lady’s maid, and a young child, the daughter of Madame Ménard. We all got up with shrieks. Madame Ménard jumped out of bed. I ran after the duke, who went out, in spite of my resistance, and locked the door of the ante-chamber upon me. I went back to the apartment and cried out to the alarmed women, ‘I am going to Beaumarchais; I will prevent this duel.’ I started from the neighborhood of the Italian Theatre, where she lives, in the direction of the Hôtel de Condé, opposite where M. de Beaumarchais lives. I met his carriage in the Rue Dauphine, near the Carrefour de Bussy. I threw myself on the horses’ heads, and then spoke to him at the window. ‘The duke is looking out for you, to fight with you. Come to my house; I will tell you the rest.’ ‘I am going to the Captainry to hold a sitting; I will go to your house

when it is finished.* He went off. I followed the carriage with my eyes, and then took the road to my own house ; as I was ascending the steps of the Pont Neuf from the Quay de Conti, I felt myself stopped by the skirt of my coat, and fell back into the arms of the Duke de Chaulnes, who, being much taller and stronger than myself, carried me off like a bird of prey, threw me, in spite of my resistance, into a hackney-coach, from which he had got down, cried out ' Rue de Condé ' to the coachman, and told me, with an oath, that I should find Beaumarchais for him. ' By what right,' I said, ' M. le Duc, do you, who are always talking about liberty, dare to attack mine ? ' ' By the right of the stronger ; you'll find Beaumarchais for me, or . . . ' ' M. le Duc, I have no arms, and you will not assassinate me, probably.' ' No, I shall only kill this Beaumarchais, and when I have plunged my sword into his body, and have torn his heart out with my teeth, this Ménard will become what she may.' (I suppress the execrable oaths by which these words were accompanied.) ' I do not know where M. de Beaumarchais is ; and if I did know, I should not tell you, in the passion in which you now are.' ' If you resist, I will strike you.' ' I shall strike you back, M. le Duc.' ' A blow to me ! ' and he at once threw himself upon me, and endeavored to take me by the hair ; but, as I wear a wig, it came off in his hand, which rendered this scene comic, as I understood from the shouts of laughter uttered by the populace around the coach, of which both the windows were open. The duke, who could see nothing, took me by the throat and inflicted several scratches on my neck, my ear, and my chin. I stopped his blows as best I could, and called loudly for the guard. He became more moderate then. I put my wig on again, and declared to him that, on leaving M. de Beaumarchais, where he was taking me by force, I would follow him nowhere except before a commissary. I made all the remonstrances which the confused state I was in, and the little time I had, would allow. Quite sure that he would not find M. de Beaumarchais at home, and equally sure that if they saw me, his servants would not fail to tell me where their master was, I was in hopes that if they saw the duke alone, his agitated state would prevent their telling him. Accordingly, the very moment the duke jumped out of the carriage to knock at M. de Beaumarchais' door, I jumped out also, and returned to my own house, but by out-of-the-way streets, lest the duke should run after me again."

* Here Gudin weakens both his own remark and Beaumarchais' answer for fear of injuring him. His real words, as restored in his manuscript and in Beaumarchais' deposition, were these: "The duke is looking for you to kill you." Beaumarchais' answer was, "He will only kill his own fleas."

I suppress that part of Gudin's deposition which contains what afterward appears in the other depositions, and only reproduce the termination on account of its tone.

"There, sir," he says, "is the exact truth of all I saw and all that happened to me. I regret it still more from the fact that this affair will probably make the Duke de Chaulnes my irreconcilable enemy, although all I did was to render a service to himself in preventing the conflict, which, however it might have terminated, could not have failed to have been fatal to him, above all, under the unfortunate circumstances by which he is at present surrounded. I said this to him himself, in the coach where he was keeping me. I am, with the most profound respect, sir, &c.,

"GUDIN DE LA BRENELLERIE."

Let us leave Gudin running away, but do not let us quit the Duke de Chaulnes, who was knocking at Beaumarchais' door.

The servants told him imprudently that their master was at the Louvre, at the Tribunal of the Captainry, and he accordingly hurried there, still anxious to kill him. Beaumarchais, who had been already warned by Gudin, was passing sentence on offenders against the game-laws when he saw his enraged enemy enter. We will now let him speak for himself. What follows is extracted from an unpublished Memorial which he addressed to the Lieutenant of Police and the Tribunal of the Marshals of France.

Exact Narrative of what took place Thursday, February 11, 1773, between M. le Duc de Chaulnes and myself, Beaumarchais.

"I had just opened the sittings at the Captainry when I saw M. le Duc de Chaulnes enter with the wildest air imaginable. He told me aloud that he had something important to communicate to me, that I must come out immediately. 'I can not, M. le Duc,' I replied; 'the public service requires that I should terminate, in a becoming manner, the task I have commenced.' I wished him to sit down; he refused; people were getting astonished at his appearance and manner. I began to fear that the affair would be understood, and suspended the sittings for a moment to go with him into a private room. There he told me, in the energetic language of the public markets, that he wished to kill me on the spot, to tear my heart out, and drink my blood, for which he thirsted. 'Oh! is that all, M. le Duc?' I replied; 'you must allow business to go before pleasure.' I wished to return; he stopped me, telling me he would tear my eyes out before

every one if I did not go out with him. 'You would be lost, M. le Duc, if you were mad enough to attempt it.' I entered calmly, and directed that a seat should be given to him. Surrounded as I was by the officers and guards of the Captainry, I exhibited, for two hours while the sittings lasted, the greatest coolness in opposition to the irritable, wild manner in which he walked about, disturbing the sittings, and saying to every one, 'Will it be much longer?*' He took M. le Comte de Marcouville, the officer who was with me, on one side, and told him that he was waiting to fight with me. M. de Marcouville sat down with a sombre expression. I made a sign to him to be silent, and continued. M. de Marcouville told M. de Vintrais, Officer of the Maréchaussée and Inspector of the Preserves. I perceived it, and again made signs for him to remain silent. I said, 'M. de Chaulnes is lost if it is supposed that he comes to take me away from here and cut my throat.' When the sittings were over I put on my walking-dress, and, going down to M. de Chaulnes, asked him what he wanted of me, and what cause of complaint he could have against a man whom he had not seen for six months. 'No explanation,' he said to me; 'let us go and fight directly, or I make a disturbance here.' 'At least,' I said, 'you will allow me to go to my house for a sword? I have only an indifferent mourning-sword in my carriage, with which you do not probably require that I should defend myself against you.' 'We will call,' he replied, 'at M. le Comte de Turpin's, who will lend you one, and whom I wish to be our witness.' He jumped into my carriage before me; I got in after him. His carriage followed us. He did me the honor to assure me that this time I should not escape, adorning his remarks with all the superb imprecations that are so familiar to him. The calmness of my replies amazed him and increased his rage. He threatened me with his fist in the carriage. I observed to him that, if he intended to fight me, a public insult could only retard his object, and that I was not going to get my sword if, in the mean while, I was to fight like a scavenger. We arrived at M. le Comte de Turpin's, who was going out. He came up to the carriage. 'M. le Duc,' I said, 'has taken me off without my knowing why; he wishes to cut throats with me; but in this strange affair he leaves me at least to hope that you will be willing, sir, to witness the conduct of the two adversaries.' M. de Turpin

* It is impossible not to notice the comic side of this scene, in which Beaumarchais, in his judge's robes, probably made the audience last as long as he could, while the duke, in his anxiety to kill him, was asking whether "it would be much longer." Beaumarchais, although not wanting in courage, was, doubtless, less in a hurry than the duke, for the latter was a colossus, and he was furious, as will be seen, even to madness.

told me that pressing business forced him to go instantly to the Luxembourg, and that it would keep him there till four in the afternoon. I had no doubt that the Count de Turpin's object was to allow a few hours for a violent temper to get calm. He went away. M. de Chaulnes wished to keep me in his house until four o'clock. 'As for that, no, M. le Duc; in the same way that I would not meet you alone on the ground, on account of the risk I should run of your accusing me of assassination if you forced me to wound you, I will not go into a house of which you are the master, and where you would not fail to play me a bad turn.' I ordered my coachman to take me home. 'If you stop there,' said M. de Chaulnes, 'I will stab you at the door.' 'Then you will have that pleasure,' I said, 'for I shall wait nowhere else until the hour which is to show me what your intentions really are.' His insults were continued while we were in the carriage. 'Stop, M. le Duc,' I said; 'when a man intends to fight, he does not talk so much. Come in, take dinner, and if I do not succeed in restoring you to your senses between now and four o'clock, and you persist in forcing me to the alternative of fighting or incurring contempt, the fate of arms will necessarily have to decide the matter.' The carriage arrived at my door. I got out, he followed, and pretended to accept my invitation to dinner. I gave my orders calmly. The footman gave me a letter, when he rushed toward it and tore it from me, before my father and all of my servants; I wished to turn the affair off as a joke. He commenced swearing; my father was frightened; I reassured him, and ordered dinner to be brought to us in my private room. We went up stairs; my servant followed me; I asked him for my sword; it was at the furbisher's. 'Go and get it,' I said; 'and if it is not ready, bring me another.' 'I forbid you to leave the room,' said M. de Chaulnes, 'or I knock you down.' 'You have changed your intention, then,' I said. 'Heaven be praised! for I could not fight without a sword.' I made a sign to my valet, who went out. I was going to write; he snatched the pen from me. I represented to him that my house was a sanctuary, which I should not violate unless he forced me to do so by his outrages. I wished to commence a parley with him about his insane idea in wanting positively to kill me. He threw himself upon my mourning sword, which had been placed on my bureau, and said to me, with all the rage of a madman, and gnashing his teeth, that I should go no farther. He drew my sword, though his own was by his side, and was about to rush upon me. 'Coward!' I cried; and, taking him around the body, so as to get beyond the reach of the weapon, I endeavored to push him toward the mantelpiece. With the hand he had at liberty, he dug his five claws into my eyes and lacerated my face, which became bathed in blood. Without loosing

my hold, I managed to ring ; the servants ran in. 'Disarm this maniac,' I cried, 'while I hold him.' My cook, as brutal and strong as the duke, took up a log to knock him down. I cried still more loudly, 'Disarm him, but do not injure him ; he would say I had attempted to assassinate him in my house.' My sword was torn away from him. Instantly he sprang at my hair, and completely stripped my forehead. The pain I experienced made me quit his body, which I was encircling, and with the full force of my arm I sent a heavy blow straight into his face. 'Wretch !' he exclaimed, 'you strike a duke and peer !' I confess that this exclamation, extravagantly absurd at such a moment, would have made me laugh at any other time ; but, as he is stronger than I am, and had taken me by the throat, I could think only of defending myself. My coat, my shirt were torn, my face was bleeding afresh. My father, an old man of seventy-five, wished to throw himself between us. He came in for his own share of the scavenger-like fury of the duke and peer. My servants interfered to separate us. I had myself lost all restraint, and the blows were returned as fast as they were given. We were now at the edge of the staircase, where the bull fell, rolling over my servants, and taking me along with him. This dreadful shock restored him somewhat to himself. He heard a knock at the street door, ran to it, saw the same young man* come in who had forewarned me that morning in my carriage, took him by the arm, pushed him into the house, and swore that no one should come in or go out, except by his order, until he had torn me to pieces. Hearing the noise he was making, a crowd had collected before the door ; one of the women of the house cried out from a window that her master was being assassinated. My young friend, alarmed at seeing me thus disfigured and covered with blood, wished to drag me up stairs. The duke would not suffer it. His fury recommenced ; he drew his sword, which had remained at his side ; for it must be remarked that none of my people had yet dared to take it away from him, thinking, as they afterward informed me, it was a mark of disrespect which might have been attended with bad results for them. He rushed upon me to run me through ; eight persons fell upon him, and he was disarmed. He wounded my valet in the head, cut my coachman's nose off, and ran my cook through the hand. 'The treacherous coward,' I exclaimed ; 'this is the second time he attacks me with a sword while I am without arms.' He ran into the kitchen to look for a knife ; he was followed, and every thing that could inflict a mortal wound was put away. I armed myself with one of the fire-irons. I was about to come down, when I heard of a thing which proved to me at once that this man had become absolutely mad ; which was, that directly he no

* It was Gudin.

longer saw me, he went into the dining-room, sat down by the table all by himself, ate a large plateful of soup and some cutlets, and drank two bottles of water. He heard another knock at the street door, ran to open it, and saw M. Chenu, the Commissary of Police, who, surprised at the horrible disorder in which he found all my servants, and startled, above all, by my lacerated face, asked me what was the matter. 'The matter is, sir,' I replied, 'that a cowardly ruffian, who came here with the intention of dining with me, sprang at my face directly he had set foot in my room, and tried to kill me with my own sword, and afterward with his own. You see, sir, that with the persons I have about me, I might have torn him to pieces; but I should have had to give him back better than he was before. His relations, delighted to have got rid of him, would, at the same time, have sought to make it an awkward affair for me. I restrained myself, and, with the exception of a hundred blows from my fist, with which I replied to the outrage he had committed on my countenance and hair, I prevented any injury being done to him.' The duke then spoke, and said 'that he had had to fight me at four o'clock, before M. le Comte de Turpin, who had been chosen to act as witness, and that he had not been able to wait until the hour agreed upon.' 'What do you think, sir, of this man, who, after committing a shameful outrage in my house, himself divulges his guilty intentions before a public official, and destroys with one word all possibility of executing his project, which this cowardice proves he had never seriously contemplated?' At these words, my ruffian, who is as brave with his fists as an English sailor, rushed a fifth time upon me. I had laid by my improvised weapon on the arrival of the commissary; reduced to those of nature, I now defended myself as best I could before the assembly, which separated us a third time. M. Chenu begged me to remain in my drawing-room, and took away the duke, who wanted to break the glasses. At this instant my valet came back with a new sword. I took it, and said to the commissary, 'Sir, I had no design to fight a duel,* nor shall I ever have one; but, without accepting a *rendezvous* from this man, I shall go about the town with this sword constantly by my side, and if he insults me—as the publicity which he gives to this horrible adventure proves, moreover, that he is the aggressor—I swear that, if I can, the world which he disgraces by his baseness shall be delivered from him.' As the weapon which I then possessed was sufficiently imposing to inspire respect, he retired, without a word, into my dining-room, where M. Chenu, who followed him, was as surprised as he was frightened to see him bruise his countenance with his fist, and tear out a handful of hair in each hand

* The laws being still very strict against a duel, the Duke de Chaulnes will be seen to deny, on his side, that he ever intended to fight one.

with rage at his inability to kill me. M. Chenu at last prevailed upon him to go home, and he had the coolness to get his hair arranged by my valet, whom he had wounded. I went up stairs to get my wounds dressed, and he threw himself into a carriage."

After some other details, which it appeared useless to introduce, Beaumarchais terminates as follows:

"I have introduced no reflection into this recital. I have stated the facts simply, and even have employed, as much as possible, the very expressions which were used, not wishing to give the slightest coloring to the truth in narrating the strangest and most disgusting adventure which could happen to a reasonable man."

Now comes the report of the Commissary of Police to M. de Sartines. It will be noticed, above all toward the end, as one of the characteristics of the period, with what reverential timidity a police magistrate, even in the exercise of his functions, spoke of a duke and peer who had conducted himself like a scavenger, and how he seemed to fear giving any explanation in reference to him.

"Feb. 13, 1773.

"Sir,—You have asked me for the details of the affair which took place between the Duke de Chaulnes and Le Sieur de Beaumarchais, which I can not give you very exactly, as I did not arrive at the house of the said Sieur de Beaumarchais until after the great disturbance was over. I found M. le Duc de Chaulnes down stairs with his sword broken, having at his side nothing but a portion of the sheath. His hair was untied, his coat and waistcoat were unbuttoned, and he had no cravat. The Sieur de Beaumarchais was in an almost similar state, and had, moreover, his black coat torn as well as his shirt. He had no cravat, his hair was untied, and in the greatest disorder, and his face was scratched in several places. I prevailed upon these gentlemen to go up stairs, to a room on the first floor, where they began again, said disagreeable things to one another, and indulged reciprocally in impolite reproaches, couched in very hard terms, which led to their taking hold of one another again, and made me fear that unfortunate consequences might come from it. I, however, calmed M. le Duc a little, and invited him to pass into another room, that we might talk together privately, which he consented to without much difficulty. I made certain representations to him in a civil manner on the subject of this scene. He listened to them, and conformed to my request, which was that nothing more should take place. This promise he gives me his word of honor that he kept; for while I went out for about half a quarter of

an hour to speak of the matter to a cordon rouge,* who was dining in the quarter, and who had been named to me by the two parties, he went away from the house of the said Sieur de Beaumarchais. It is reported in public that M. le Duc de Chaulnes was rude to me, although he knew who I was. This fact is positively false; I have only praise to bestow on the conduct of M. le Duc, who *did not even say any thing disagreeable to me*, but, on the contrary, treated me with much civility, and *even* consideration.† In doing him this justice, I at the same time serve the cause of truth.

"I am, with respect, &c., CHENU, Commissary."

The reader must be desirous of hearing the Duke de Chaulnes explain himself in his turn. We will append the deposition written and addressed by him to the court of the Marshals of France. With the aid of the preceding documents it will be easy to discover in his narrative the points in regard to which he dissimulates or distorts facts. The style of this deposition, which I reproduce literally, has also its importance as a sign of the times.

"For more than three years," writes the Duke de Chaulnes, "I had the misfortune of being the dupe of M. de Beaumarchais, whom I thought my friend, when valid reasons induced me to keep him at a distance. It reached my ears several times after this that he had been in the habit of speaking very ill of me. Finally, last Thursday, I found Le Sieur Gudin, one of his friends, at the house of a woman of my acquaintance. He had the audacity‡ to assure her, on the part of Le Sieur de Beaumarchais, that it was not true, as I had stated, that a lady of quality had complained of his conduct.§ *Wishing to have this contradiction explained, I went to look for Le Sieur*

* The Count de Turpin.

† Here the Commissary of Police adds, in a note, "*As well as the Sieur de Beaumarchais.*" It is somewhat curious to find this magistrate stating that the Duke de Chaulnes did "*not even say any thing disagreeable to him.*" That he "*even showed him consideration,*" &c.

‡ It is scarcely probable that Gudin had any kind of "audacity."

§ This related to the subject already mentioned in Gudin's deposition, and which, if the unpublished manuscript is to be believed, related to some indiscretion of which Beaumarchais was falsely accused in reference to a noble lady, the daughter of a Marshal of France, whom Gudin does not name. It can be easily seen that the duke does not choose to confess the real motive of his rage. He confesses it, in another letter, to the Duke de la Vallière, in which he acknowledges himself guilty of having allowed himself to be led away by a "transport of jealous rage."

de Beaumarchais, at his own house, with Le Sieur Gudin, whom I took in the same hackney-coach as myself, so that he might not have time to prepare him. The Sieur de Beaumarchais being at the Tribunal of the Captainry, I went there and took him into a room apart, to tell him that I wished for an explanation. So little was there any question of it during the sitting, that I spoke to him about a game license which he promised to obtain for me at Orly. Count de Marcouville and other officers of the Captainry were present. On leaving the Captainry, I got into his carriage and told the coachman to go to M. de Turpin, who was connected with the explanation I desired. M. de Turpin, who was going out, observed to us that it would be better to get into a hackney-coach than to remain with three carriages collected at his door; that, moreover, it was two o'clock, and that he only had a minute to spare, because he was expected at the Emperor's embassy. Having got into the carriage, M. de Beaumarchais said to me that, in any case, I could not ask him for satisfaction, because he had only a mourning-sword. I observed to him that, *if there were any question* of such a thing*, I was not better armed than himself, since I had only a small sword without a guard: that I would, besides, change with him if he desired it; but that, first of all, we wanted a more ample explanation. M. de Turpin observed again that he was obliged to go away, which he did, with the understanding that he was to come to my house at four. I went with M. de Beaumarchais to his house *to dine there*;† but hardly had he reached his room, when he began to address the most atrocious insults to me. I told him that he was an ill-bred person, and that he should come out immediately, and give me satisfaction in the street; but he preferred calling four of his people, who, with himself, threw themselves upon me and took my sword away.‡ He, at the same time, sent his sister for M. Chenu, the Commissary of Police, before whom he again dared to have the impudence to say to me that I lied like a low scoundrel, and a thousand other horrible things. On leaving M. de Beaumarchais, I went and made my statement to M. de

* "If there were any question of it" is amusing; the duke, summoned before the Tribunal of the Marshals of France, does not like to avow that he has challenged Beaumarchais.

† "To dine there" is charming in its *naïveté*, after the conversation with Gudin in the hackney-coach, in which the duke says he wishes to tear Beaumarchais' heart out with his teeth.

‡ Beaumarchais' account is ten times more probable, and completely destroys this statement of the duke's, who, moreover, destroys himself in the next phrase; for, if Beaumarchais had intended to have the duke knocked down by four of his people, what interest could he have had in sending at the same time for the Commissary of Police?

Sartines, and the next day but one afterward, by his advice, to M. de la Vrillière. On returning from Versailles, I learned that Le Sieur de Beaumarchais was retailing the story to my disparagement, saying that he had challenged me, and that I had refused to follow him. In order to destroy, in a positive manner, all mystery about this point, I thought it best (many serious persons thought the same) to go to the lobbies of the theatres, and say that, as M. de Beaumarchais was stating things against my honor, and was not of noble birth, he did not deserve that I should compromise myself as I had done the day before, but should be corrected like a plebeian. Since this time the Sieur de Beaumarchais has been at liberty four days without my hearing any thing of him. It would have been difficult to know that he was of noble birth, as he is the son of a watchmaker; he does not even appear in the 'Royal Almanac' as King's Secretary,* and it was not even known at the court, for a long time, whether he was eligible. Altogether, if the majority of the facts of this affair could not be verified as easily as they can, even if the insults which M. de Beaumarchais had the impudence to address to me before the commissary himself did not afford a strong presumption of what he might say and do in the absence of witnesses, it would be sufficient for me to remind persons that I have never been known to a law-court, to the police, in Paris or in any place, as a quarrelsome person, a gambler, or a madman, while the reputation of M. de Beaumarchais is far from being equally intact; for, independently of his well-known insolence, and the most incredible rumors, *he is at this moment undergoing a criminal prosecution for forgery.*"

This last phrase of the Duke de Chaulnes is a gross calumny, for he knew perfectly well that *Beaumarchais was not undergoing a criminal prosecution for forgery*, but that he was engaged in a civil action with the Count de la Blache on the subject of a deed of which he disputed the genuineness, without ever daring to prosecute him directly for forgery. We can, however, see by this what a disastrous influence this action with La Blache exercised on Beaumarchais' reputation, since the Duke de Chaulnes did not fear, during the very time of the action, to distort facts in so revolting a manner. The fact of the duke doing thus the honors of his adversary's morality obliges us to remind the reader that he himself was at this

* All the preceding passage is very significant in style. The last assertion of the duke is incorrect. I have not been able to test it by the Almanac of 1773, but I have found the name of Beaumarchais in several Almanacs of an earlier date.

time bringing an action of a horribly scandalous nature against his own mother ; that the documents beneath our eyes prove that he was as debauched and disorderly in every way as he was brutal ; and that, after being banished from the kingdom for acts of violence, his entire life was but a series of acts of the same nature.

The day of the 11th of February having been so stormy, it would be natural to think that Beaumarchais employed the evening in regaining his tranquillity, in repose, and in taking precautions for the next day ; however, if I am to believe Gudin's manuscript, as he was expected the same evening at the house of one of his friends, to read "The Barber of Seville" to a numerous party, he arrived at the rendezvous fresh and ready—at least morally so—read his comedy with much *verve*, gave a lively account of the furious behavior of the Duke de Chaulnes, and passed a portion of the night in playing the harp and singing seguedillas. "Thus," says Gudin, "in every circumstance of his life he was entirely devoted to whatever occupied his attention, without being turned away from it either by what had taken place or by what was to follow, so sure was he of his own faculties and of his presence of mind. He never needed preparation on any point ; his intelligence was at his command at all times, and his principles were never at fault."

The next morning Gudin tells us how old M. Caron brought his son an old sword of the time of his youth, and said to him, "You young men have now only indifferent arms ; here is a substantial one, and of a time when people fought more often than they do in the present day : take it ; and if that scoundrel of a duke approaches you, kill him like a mad dog." However, the duel was no longer possible ; the Duke de Chaulnes had thought fit to go to the lobbies of all the theatres, and declare openly that, as his rival was not a nobleman, he should correct him like a plebeian. The altercation having thus been made public, the Tribunal of the Marshals of France, which decided cases of this kind between noblemen—(and, without wishing to contradict the Duke de Chaulnes, Beaumarchais was one, it will be remembered, in virtue of his *receipt*)—the Tribunal of the Marshals took up the affair, and sent a guard to each of the two adversaries.

During the interval the Duke de la Vrillière, minister of the king's household, had summoned Beaumarchais, and ordered him to retire to the country for some days; and as he protested energetically against such an order—the compliance with which, immediately after the threats of the Duke de Chaulnes, would have compromised his honor—the minister had directed him to remain under arrest at his own house until he had rendered an account of this conflict to the king. It was at this juncture that the Tribunal of the Marshals of France successively called the two contending parties before it. Beaumarchais had no trouble in proving that all his crime consisted in being preferred to a duke and peer by a pretty woman, in possession of her liberty, which was not a capital offense; and the result of the inquiry having been unfavorable to the Duke de Chaulnes, the latter was sent on the 19th of February, by a *lettre de cachet*, to the chateau of Vincennes. The Tribunal of the Marshals of France having summoned Beaumarchais a second time, informed him that he was free, and no longer under arrest.

All this was sufficiently just; but Beaumarchais, who was rather distrustful of human justice, called upon the Duke de la Vrillière to know whether he was really to consider himself at liberty. Not finding him at home, he left a message for him, and then went straight to M. de Sartines to put the same question to him. The lieutenant of police replied that he was perfectly free. Then, and not till then, he considered himself secure from all accident, and ventured into the streets of Paris. He had reckoned without his host; the very little mind of the Duke de la Vrillière was offended at the Tribunal of the Marshals of France rescinding "in the name of the king" an order of arrest which had been imposed by him "in the name of the king," and, in order to teach this tribunal to pay more regard to his authority, sent Beaumarchais on the 24th of February, still "in the name of the king," to For-l'Evêque. Perhaps, also, he was made to perceive that it was unbecoming to send a duke and peer to Vincennes, while the son of a watchmaker got off with having merely to repair, as best he could, the damage done to his countenance by the duke and peer's violence.

CHAPTER X.

Beaumarchais at For-l'Evêque.—Beaumarchais in Seclusion.—Madame Mênard's Intercession.—Beaumarchais in his Prison.—Beaumarchais gives in.—A Letter to a Child.—Goëzman and his Report.—Beaumarchais in Despair.

BEAUMARCHAIS, then, was taken away from his family, his occupation, his lawsuit, and imprisoned, contrary to all justice. At another period, such an act of iniquity would not have passed without notice; but the public then took but little interest in the man who was shortly to become its idol. "This individual," said "Bachaumont's Miscellany," speaking of "The Barber of Seville," and of the adventures we are relating, "this very insolent individual, who has so much self-assurance, is not liked; and although in this quarrel it does not appear that there is any thing to reproach him with, he is pitied less than another person would be for the vexations he has experienced."

Beaumarchais' first letter from his prison is philosophic enough; it is addressed to Gudin.

"In virtue," he writes, "of a *lettre sans cachet*,* called *lettre de cachet*, signed Louis, and lower down, Phelippeaux, recommended Sartines, executed Buchot, and undergone Beaumarchais, I have been domiciled, my friend, since this morning, at For-l'Evêque, in a room without a carpet, at a rent of 2160 livres, where I am given to hope that I shall want nothing. Is it the duke's family which I have saved from a criminal prosecution that imprisons me? Is it the minister, whose orders I have constantly followed or anticipated? Is it the dukes and peers, with whom I can never have any thing to do? That I can not say; but the sacred name of the king is such a fine thing that it can not be too much repeated and made use of. It is thus that, in all well-regulated countries, those who can not be

* This pleasantry, which Beaumarchais repeats in his Memorials against Goëzman, is explained by the fact that the *lettres de cachet*, which are also called *lettres closes*, differed from other royal missives in so far that they only bore the king's sign-manual, and were not sealed with the great seal of state.

inculcated with justice are punished by authority! What can be done? Wherever there are men, odious things take place; and the great wrong of being right is always a crime in the eyes of power, which wishes incessantly to punish and never to judge."

But if, on the first day of his captivity, he appeared to have resigned himself to his fate with sufficient philosophy, he was soon horribly annoyed; his incarceration, occurring as it did in the middle of his action against the Count de la Blache, did him fearful injury; his adversary, profiting by the circumstance, labored incessantly to blacken his character in the opinion of the judge; took all sorts of steps; obtained the recommendations and solicitations of influential persons, and pressed eagerly for the case to be decided, while the unfortunate prisoner whose fortune and honor were engaged in this affair could not even manage to obtain permission to go out for a few hours, in order that he, in his turn, might visit his judges. M. de Sartines showed the greatest kindness to him, but he could only alleviate his position; his liberty depended on the minister. Beaumarchais had commenced by representing his case to the Duke de la Vrillière as that of a citizen unjustly imprisoned. He sent him memorials upon memorials, containing superabundant proof that he had done no wrong. He demanded to be informed of the reason of his detention; and when M. de Sartines warned him, in a friendly manner, that his tone would lead to nothing, he replied with haughtiness, "The only satisfaction of the persecuted is to testify that they are persecuted unjustly."

While exhausting himself in vain protests, the period for the decision of his lawsuit drew near; to M. de Sartines' request that he might be allowed to go out for some hours in the day, the Duke de la Vrillière replied, without writing, "This man is too insolent; let him leave the conduct of his affair to his solicitor." Thereupon Beaumarchais, with despair and indignation, wrote to M. de Sartines in these words:

"It has been clearly proved to me now that I am intended to lose my suit, if it is a suit that can be lost, or about which there is even a doubt; but I confess to you that I was not prepared for the derisive observation of the Duke de la Vrillière, who tells me to 'leave the representations connected with my affair to my solicitor,' when he

knows as well as I do that solicitors are not allowed to make them. Great gods! can they not ruin an innocent man without laughing in his face? * Thus I have been grievously insulted, and justice has been denied me because my adversary is a man of quality. I have been put in prison, and I am kept there because I have been insulted by a man of quality! People go so far as to find fault with me for correcting the public of the false impression it has received, while the shameless 'Gazette de Deux-ponts' and 'Gazette de Hollande' libel me in a scandalous manner, in order to serve my adversary of quality. A little more, and I should have been told that I was very insolent to be insulted in every possible manner by a man of quality; for what does the phrase mean which is considered a sufficient answer for all persons interceding in my behalf: 'He made too much fuss about the affair?' Could I do less than ask for justice, and prove, from the actions of my adversary, that I was not to blame? What a pretext for ruining and destroying an injured man, to say, 'He has talked about the affair too much;' as if it were possible for me to speak of any thing else! Receive my thanks, sir, for having communicated to me this refusal and this remark of M. la Vrillière; and, for the happiness of this country, may your power be one day equal to your wisdom and your integrity! There will then be no need of petitions for unhappy men to present. My gratitude is equal to the profound respect with which I am, &c.,

"March 11, 1773."

"BEAUMARCHAIS.

Mademoiselle Ménard was joining her solicitations to those of Beaumarchais. Let us quote, in reference to this subject, another letter from the prisoner to M. de Sartines, which appears to us rather *piquante* both in details and form:

"At For-l'Evêque, March 20, 1773.

"Sir,—M. the Duke de la Vrillière said to Choisy last week that I ought to know why I was in prison, as he had told me in his letter. The truth is, that I have received neither letter nor note from any one on the subject of my detention. I am allowed the privilege of guessing the cause if I can, according to the custom of the Roman Inquisition.

"Madame Ménard only told me yesterday, through one of her friends, that you had kindly promised her to make a fresh effort with the minister in my favor next Sunday; but the mysterious manner in which the information was given to me might almost make me

* I have said elsewhere that Beaumarchais was a pagan in love. He was a pagan, to some extent, in every thing, without being aware of it; for he here writes quite naturally "great gods!" in the plural, as Horace or Tibullus might exclaim "Dii immortales!"

doubt its truth, for the good little girl conveyed it with all the pretty and puerile *mignardises* with which her sex season the slightest favors. If I am to believe her, it is necessary to have a special order to see me, witnesses to accompany her, permissions to write to me, and even to take precautions in venturing to correspond with me by means of a third party. Through all this, however, *agnosco veteris vestigia flammæ*, and I can not help smiling at this mixture of childishness and kindly interest. The idea of persuading me that the minister does me the favor to pay me the most severe attention, even to my intimacies! Does the tennis-player, in handling the balls, inquire of what the interior is made?

"However this may be, sir, I renew my anxious prayers that you will call the attention of the minister to the fearful injury which may result to me from not making a personal solicitation in the La Blache case, and I offer you my most sincere thanks if you have, indeed, had the kindness to promise Madame Ménard to do so.

"I venture to hope that you will not tell this excellent woman that I have informed you of the importance which she pretends is attached to the frivolous steps she takes in so important an affair, in which the question is no less a one than that of the detention of a citizen who has been insulted, grievously insulted, who is a plaintiff not yet heard, and who is thrown by the authorities in prison, and left there to rot and be ruined.

"The more this amiable child endeavors to make me believe, the less would she pardon me for doubting what she says, above all for informing you of it, and, as Ovid or Propertius says, *nullæ sunt inimiciæ nisi amoris acerbæ*; but I perceive that in blaming her I behave like herself, and that I indiscreetly mix up trifling matters with the most serious requests. I stop, and am, with the most profound respect, sir, your very humble and obedient servant,

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

This correspondence, in which Beaumarchais associated Virgil, Ovid, Propertius, and Mademoiselle Ménard in defense of his citizen's rights, doubtless amused M. de Sartines, but in no way advanced the interests of the prisoner. What the Duke de la Vrillière required from him, before every thing, was, that he should cease to be insolent, that is to say, to ask for justice, and that he should make up his mind to ask for pardon. He had held up for nearly a month, until the 20th of March, when, on that very day, he received a long letter, without a signature, written by a man who appeared to take a great interest in him, and who endeavored to make him understand that, under an

absolute government, when the disgrace of a minister has been incurred, when this minister is keeping you in prison, and when you have the greatest interest in getting out of prison, the thing is not to plead in the character of an oppressed citizen, but to submit to the law of might, and assume the character of the suppliant. What was Beaumarchais to do? He was on the point of losing a lawsuit of the greatest importance to his fortune and honor; his liberty was in the hands of a man who was personally far from estimable, for the Duke de la Vrillière is one of the ministers most justly despised in history; but the situation was such that this man could dispose of his destiny as he thought fit. Beaumarchais at last became resigned and humbled himself. Here we have him in the position of a suppliant:

“ Monseigneur,—The dreadful affair of the Duke de Chaulnes has resulted for me in a chain of misfortunes without end, and the greatest of all is that of having incurred your displeasure; but if, in spite of the purity of my intentions, the grief by which I am distracted has carried me away, and induced me to take steps which may have displeased you, I disavow them at your feet, Monseigneur, and beg you to grant me your generous pardon; or if I appear to you to deserve a longer term of imprisonment, permit me only to go out for some days, in order to instruct my judges with regard to an affair which is of the greatest importance to my fortune and honor, and after its decision I will submit with gratitude to whatever punishment you may impose upon me. The whole of my family, in tears, join their prayers to mine. Every one, Monseigneur, praises your indulgence and the goodness of your heart. Shall I be the only one to implore you in vain? By a single word you can overwhelm a multitude of honest persons with joy, whose lively gratitude will equal the very profound respect with which we are all, and myself especially, Monseigneur, yours, &c.,

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

“ At For-l'Evêque, March 21, 1773.”

The Duke de la Vrillière was satisfied in his paltry vanity; accordingly, he did not delay sending an answer. The next day, March 22, the minister forwarded to M. de Sartines an authorization allowing the prisoner to go out, under the conduct of a police agent, obliging him, at the same time, to return to For-l'Evêque to sleep.

In case the reader should happen not to consider Beaumarchais sufficiently heroic, I will observe that the Duke de Chaul-

nes, imprisoned, on his side, at Vincennes, whose correspondence is also beneath my eyes, was not more so. By a somewhat strange coincidence, he also had a lawsuit to follow up, and affairs to transact, and his letters to the Duke de la Vrillière are not less plaintive than those of Beaumarchais. Like the latter, he is allowed to go out, under the conduct of a police agent, on condition that he will leave his rival in peace, and will not go to see Mademoiselle Ménard contrary to her wishes. The person charged with surveillance of all these "important interests" is M. de Sartines, who receives simultaneously the alternately facetious and despondent notes of Beaumarchais, and the "unedifying sighs" of the Duke de Chaulnes.

Let us return to Beaumarchais, who profited by his half-liberty to go, as was the custom then, and solicit his judges. Before showing how he lost his lawsuit, let me be allowed to extract once more from his prison correspondence a somewhat graceful little incident in which he appears in a very pleasing light. I have elsewhere stated that he was on an intimate footing with M. Lenormant D'Etiolles, the husband of Madame de Pompadour, who, after the death of his first wife, had married again, and who had a charming child six years and a half old. This little boy, who was named Constant, was very fond of Beaumarchais, and on hearing that his friend was in prison, he wrote to him, of his own accord, the following letter :

" Neuilly, March 2, 1773.

" SIR,—I send you my purse, because people in prison are always poor. I am very sorry you are in prison. Every morning and every evening I say an Ave Maria for you.

" I have the honor to be, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

CONSTANT."

Beaumarchais replied immediately to the mother and child by two letters, in which all his good nature and delicacy of feeling are shown. Here is, first of all, his letter to Madame Lenormant :

" I thank you very sincerely, madame, for having conveyed to me the letter and purse of my little friend Constant. These are the first promptings of benevolence on the part of a young nature from which excellent things may be expected. Do not give him back his own

purse, so that he may not conclude that all sacrifices bring with them this species of reward. It will be very gratifying to him one day to see it in your hands, as a memorial of the affectionate kindness of his generous heart. Compensate him in a manner which will give him a just idea of the nature of his action, without allowing himself to become proud of having done it. But I do not know what I am saying when I make these observations. Your care has originated and developed in him so great a quality as that of beneficence at an age when all morality consists in referring things to one's own interest. Receive my thanks and compliments. Allow M. l'Abbé Leroux* to share them; he is not contented with teaching his pupils to decline the word virtue, he also teaches them to love it; he is full of merit, and more fitted than any other man to second your views. This letter and this purse have produced quite a child's delight in myself. Happy parents! you have a son six years of age capable of such an action. And I also had a son; but he is no more! And yours already gives you such pleasures! I share them with all my heart, and I beg that you will continue to have a little affection for him who has been the cause of this charming trait on the part of our little Constant. Nothing can be added to the respectful attachment of him who makes it his honor to be, madame, &c.

"At For-l'Evêque, March 4, 1773."

Now comes the answer to little Constant:

"My little friend Constant,—I have received with much gratitude your letter and the purse you added to it; I have made a just division of what they contained, according to the different wants of my fellow-prisoners and myself, keeping the best portion for your friend Beaumarchais—I mean the prayers, the Aves, of which I have certainly great need, and distributing to poor people, who were in distress, all the money your purse contained. Thus, while intending to oblige one man only, you have earned the gratitude of many. This is the ordinary fruit of actions like yours. Good-by, my little friend Constant,

BEAUMARCHAIS."

This is the man whom the Count la Blache charitably entitled a "finished monster," a "venomous species of being, of which society ought and must be purged;" and at the time the count spoke thus, his opinion was almost universally adopted. It was in vain that Beaumarchais, followed by his guard, and coming back every evening to prison, passed the day in running about to the residences of his judges; the discredit which was then attached to his name followed him every

* This was little Constant's preceptor.

where. Under the influence of this discredit, and on the report of the councilor Goëzman, the Parliament decided at length between him and M. de la Blache, and, April 6, 1773, gave a judgment which was extraordinary in a legal point of view; this judgment, overruling that of the lower court, declared to be null and void an act which had been signed of their own free will by two majors, without any necessity existing, said the sentence, "for letters of rescision;" that is to say, that the question of fraud, surprise, or error being put on one side, Beaumarchais found himself declared indirectly a forger, although there was no accusation of forgery against him. And in order that no doubt might exist as to the meaning of the decision, it was subsequently explained as follows by the judge Goëzman, who had induced the decision, and who will soon appear as the personal adversary of the litigant whom he had already sacrificed. "The Parliament," he said, "has thereby decided, not exactly that the engagements which this writing appeared to attribute to M. Paris du Verney were the effect of fraud, surprise, or error, but that they were certainly not made by M. du Verney; in one word, that the writing which appears above the signature has been produced without his having had any thing to do with it; and as M. Caron admits that this writing is entirely in his hand, it follows that he is declared to have fabricated a fraudulent document." While this decision disgraced Beaumarchais, it at the same time gave a heavy blow to his fortune. The Parliament had not dared to give M. de la Blache, as he had demanded, all the claims which appeared in the statement of accounts declared null: the injustice would have been too flagrant; but it condemned his adversary to pay the 56,300 livres of debts which the statement of accounts annulled, the interest on these debts for five years, and the expenses of the action. Beaumarchais exaggerates a little in his Memorials against Goëzman when he says the action cost him 50,000 crowns; it cost him less, but sufficient to crush him, particularly as at the very moment when the Count de la Blache seized all his goods and income, other pretended creditors, with no more real claims than the count, but enticed by his success, united their prosecutions to his; and this man, attacked by so

many disasters at once, obliged to make head against them all, and to support his father, his sisters, and his nieces, petitioned with the greatest earnestness, but in vain, that his prison doors might be opened.

"My courage is exhausted," he writes, April 9, 1773, to M. de Sartines. "The public report is that I am entirely sacrificed; my credit has fallen, my affairs have been ruined; my family, of whom I am the father and the support, is in the greatest distress. Sir, I have done good throughout my life, without ostentation, and have always been torn to pieces by the wicked. If you were acquainted with the interior of my home, you would see that, as a good son, a good brother, a good husband, and a useful citizen, I have collected nothing but blessings around me; while abroad, I have been calumniated without shame. Whatever revenge may be taken upon me for this miserable affair of the Duke de Chaulnes, is it not to have some bounds? It is fully proved that my imprisonment costs me 100,000 francs. The substance, the form, every thing in this unjust decision, causes shudders, and I can not recover from its effect as long as I am kept in a horrible prison. I have sufficient strength to resist my own misfortunes; I have none to oppose to the tears of my worthy father, who is seventy-five years old, and who is dying from grief at the abject condition into which I have fallen; I have none against the grief of my sisters and nieces, who are already terrified by the poverty in store for them, owing to the state in which my detention has thrown me personally, and the disorder into which it has plunged my affairs. All the activity of my mind turns now against myself; my situation is killing me; I am struggling against an acute disease, of which I feel the premonitory symptoms in inability to sleep and distaste for every kind of food; the atmosphere of my prison is infected, and is destroying my wretched health."

The reader sees that there is no exaggeration in the eloquent pages of the Memorials against Goëzman, in which, at a later period, Beaumarchais represents his situation in prison. They are but a more ornate reproduction of the complaints this situation draws from him in the unpublished letter we have just given.

The minister, La Vrillière, was at last moved, and on the 8th May, 1773, after an imprisonment of two months and a half, without cause, restored the prisoner to liberty. And now from this lawsuit, which he lost, arises a new, a more terrible lawsuit, which was calculated to complete Beaumarchais'

ruin, but which saved him, which made him pass, in a few months, from a state of dejection and misfortune, in which, to employ his own expressions, he felt shame and pity for himself, to that of a man triumphing over a Parliament, and the favorite of an entire nation. "He was," said Grimm, "the horror of all Paris a year since; every one, upon the mere word of his neighbor, thought him capable of the greatest crimes: at present, every one is full of his virtues." It remains to us to explain how this revulsion in opinion took place.

CHAPTER XI.

The Maupeou Parliament.—Beaumarchais' Action against Goëzman.

THE Goëzman lawsuit opens the brilliant period of Beaumarchais' life. By turns a courtier, a speculator, and a playwright, the son of Caron the watchmaker, in all these different paths, had, as yet, only met with doubtful, disputed success, and the most ardent enmity. He was at last about to conquer fortune and regain a lengthened popularity, and to associate his name with an important fact in the history of our country.

What was the subject of this famous quarrel between Beaumarchais and the councilor Goëzman? It all depended upon whether the wife of a judge had or had not received fifteen louis from one of the parties to a suit.

It will be remembered what the situation of the author of "The Barber of Seville" was in April, 1773, when his action against the Count de la Blache was under the consideration of the court of appeal. Imprisoned at For-l'Evêque, he had obtained, as the period for giving judgment drew near, permission to go out during the day to have interviews with his judges, according to the custom of the period. The affair had been deliberated upon, and was to be decided from the report of a councilor named Goëzman. This Goëzman, who was first a councilor at the Supreme Council of Alsace, had sold his appointment, and in 1765 had come to Paris, where he established himself. He was a jurisconsult of some learn-

ing; among other works he had published a "Treatise on the Common Law of Fiefs," which was not without merit. But to judge of him by various particulars which I find among Beaumarchais' papers, whether the value of his appointment in Alsace did not belong to him, or whether it had been dissipated by him, it would appear that the life he led in Paris was to some extent that of an adventurer, and rather questionable as regarded its morality, when the Maupeou chancellor introduced him in 1771 into the ill-received body which he had just established in place of the old Parliament. This judge had married for his second wife a woman who was still young and sufficiently pretty, and whose conversation was calculated to do little honor to her husband's honesty and her own, for it was proved in the course of the lawsuit of which we are about to give an account that she had said before witnesses, "It would be impossible to live decently with what we get, but we know the art of plucking the fowl without making it cry out." It can be seen that if the Chancellor Maupeou suppressed the gratuities, some of the new magistrates possessed the secret of replacing them with advantage. Remarks of the above nature were frequently made by Madame Goëzman at the house of a librarian named Lejay, who sold the works of the husband, and received the visits of the wife. This librarian, who did not know Beaumarchais, hearing from a mutual friend that he was in despair at not being able to gain access to the reporter, informed him that the only means of obtaining audiences from, and insuring the equity of the judge who had to prepare the report, was by making a present to his wife, and he accordingly asked for 200 louis to give her. Beaumarchais gave 100 louis, and a watch adorned with diamonds of equal value; Madame Goëzman wanted fifteen louis more, which she said were for her husband's secretary. The fifteen louis were sent; the lady declared to Lejay that, if Beaumarchais lost his action, all he gave would be restored to him except the fifteen louis, which in any case would remain the property of the secretary. The day afterward Beaumarchais obtained an audience from the reporter Goëzman; two days after that this judge decided against him. Madame Goëzman returned faithfully the hundred louis and

the watch; but Beaumarchais having inquired of the secretary, to whom in the course of the trial he had already given ten louis, whether he had received in addition fifteen louis from Madame Goëzman, ascertained that she had given nothing to him, and that the fifteen louis had remained in her pocket. Irritated already by the loss of an action which was equally important to his fortune and his honor, he disapproved of Madame Goëzman indulging in so dishonest a speculation, and decided to write to her and claim the fifteen louis. This was a grave step; for if the councilor's wife refused to restore the money and denied having received it, if Beaumarchais insisted upon having it, and if the affair made a noise, a very dangerous quarrel might arise out of it. But the step, with its dangers, also presented its advantages: persuaded, with or without reason, that the Count de la Blache had given more money than himself to the Councilor Goëzman, Beaumarchais, in meeting the danger of a personal dispute with this magistrate, hoped to convict him of venality, and thus, with greater ease, get the judgment which had been made upon his report annulled. What he had foreseen took place: Madame de Goëzman, obliged either to admit the misappropriation of the fifteen louis, and restore them, or to deny that she had received them, took the latter course. She declared loudly that presents had been offered to her by Beaumarchais with a view of gaining her husband's interest, but that she had refused his criminal offer. Goëzman interfered, and denounced Beaumarchais to the Parliament as guilty of having calumniated the wife of a judge, after having vainly endeavored to corrupt her, and, through her, to corrupt her husband.

As the fact of the presents having been accepted and kept until after the decision of the La Blache suit, and of the fifteen louis having been asked for and retained by Madame Goëzman, was proved in the clearest manner by judicial investigation, it is difficult to understand how the husband of this lady had the imprudence to institute such an action. It may be supposed that, in the first instance, he was ignorant of the shameful traffic which his wife had been pursuing; it may be supposed that the latter, when she took the 100 louis and the watch, and still required fifteen louis more, had said

to herself, "I shall not speak about the matter to my husband; if he decides in favor of Beaumarchais and makes him gain his action, the latter, delighted with the result, will keep the secret, I shall retain the whole, and my husband, who otherwise is ignorant of what has taken place between us, will not be compromised. If, on the other hand, my husband is unfavorable to Beaumarchais, and he loses his action, I will restore him the 100 louis and the watch; as it is agreed that the fifteen louis, which I have said were destined for my husband's secretary, can not be claimed back, even in case of the action being lost, I will keep them for myself, so that in any case there will be a slight profit. Even if Beaumarchais should happen to hear that these fifteen louis had not been disposed of in the manner stated, he would not dare to claim the return of such a petty sum, which in any case was to cease to be his, and to expose himself to a grave accusation; if he dared to do so, I would tell my husband that he tried to corrupt me, and that I had repelled his offers of bribery, as would be proved by my having sent back the 100 louis and the watch; that, as for the fifteen louis which he claims, it is a mere fable which he has invented in revenge for not having succeeded in bribing me; and as it is scarcely natural that the wife of a councilor of the Parliament, who sends back 100 louis and a watch of the same value, would persist in keeping fifteen louis,* my husband will not doubt my veracity, and will have Beaumarchais punished."

Such a train of reasoning as this would be nothing astonishing in the case of a woman who was as thoughtless as she was rapacious and vulgar; but it is far less probable that the councilor Goëzman, a man who had seen life, and who was an experienced criminal lawyer, could have been deceived by

* The improbability of this is in fact one of the principal arguments which Madame Goëzman used in her defense. But she had begun by concealing the fact that she had kept the hundred louis two days, and had only restored them after the decision of the action; and when the retraction of the bookseller Lejay, who in the first instance stated a falsehood, at the instigation of her husband, obliged her to confess this fact, she declared that Lejay left the 100 louis without her knowledge in a flower-case which stood on the mantel-piece. It need not be said that Lejay refuted her on this point, as on all others.

his wife's reasoning, and that upon her simple affirmation he could have been led to believe that Beaumarchais was mad enough to lay himself open to an inevitable condemnation by daring to claim fifteen louis which had *not* been received, and kept by Madame Goëzman. It appears to me, beyond doubt, then, that directly he heard of Beaumarchais' claim, Goëzman, by interrogating the different persons who had been mixed up with all this huckstering, must have convinced himself that his wife had compromised herself in a grave manner. Once compromised, however, by her, he had to choose between certain courses of action, all of which, in the case of a discontented and indiscreet suitor, appeared likely to damage his reputation: the one on which he ultimately determined was incontestably the boldest, but also the most unjust of all. Starting from the idea that Beaumarchais was not powerful enough to resist him, he imagined that, by taking the initiative in the contest, and manœuvring so as to prevent the truth from becoming apparent, he could at the same time ruin the person who had given the fifteen louis, and save the one who, after asking for them to give to another, had appropriated them to her own benefit. It will be seen directly how Goëzman's plans were disconcerted, and how severely they were punished.

What confirms me in my opinion that this magistrate acted in bad faith from the moment of the accusation is not only the result of the action, after which he received the condemnation of his colleagues and was obliged to quit his office—for they might only have wished to visit the faults of his wife on his own want of skill—but in the papers subsequently given up to Beaumarchais by M. de Sartines I find it proved that, before having recourse to the Parliament, Goëzman tried to get rid of this importunate suitor by means of a *lettre de cachet*, and that for an instant he really hoped this trifling service would be rendered to him, for on the 5th June, 1773, he wrote to M. de Sartines the following note :

"I beg that *the punishment* may appear to proceed, in a *sufficiently evident manner*, from the insult offered to my wife, and indirectly to myself. Will you be kind enough to inform me to-morrow what course has been adopted, and rely on my eternal devotion?"

As the government did not dare to risk such an injustice,

and as the story of the fifteen louis was beginning to be spread about, even in the Palais de Justice itself, the countilor Goëzman took precautions to render the attack irresistible. He summoned the bookseller Lejay, who had been his wife's agent, and, after frightening him by threats, and reassuring him at the same time as to the consequences of the deed he required from him, made him copy the minute of a false affidavit, which he had prepared himself, and in which Lejay, corroborating the falsehoods of Madame Goëzman, declared that Beaumarchais had urged him to endeavor to corrupt this lady, by making her offers of presents, but that she had indignantly rejected them all. Armed with this false affidavit, he decided at last to call down the vengeance of the Parliament on the head of a man who had been much calumniated, and over whom he expected to gain an easy triumph.

Beaumarchais' disrepute was indeed at its height. The judgment given in the La Blache suit, in accordance with the report of this same Goëzman, had cast a stain on his honor and destroyed his fortune. His victorious adversary had seized all his goods, and did not leave him a moment's repose. In the midst of this distress, he found himself charged by a judge with bribery and calumny before other judges who were interested in finding him guilty. This new prosecution, being of a criminal nature, had, according to the laws of the period, to be conducted secretly, and decided with closed doors. The Maupeou Parliament could not do otherwise than hasten to punish, with the most extreme rigor, a prisoner who was brought before it charged with actions which endangered the dignity and very existence of this judicial body, already the object of much hatred; and criminal jurisprudence was then allowed a frightful latitude, for, in the case of a person charged with the offense in question, it permitted the most severe punishment, after the punishment of death, *omnia citra mortem*.

Beaumarchais, then, had reached the extreme point, in reference to which the poet has said, *Una salus victis nullam sperare salutem*. Placed between two chances—which were about equal—that of being sacrificed if he defended himself in the regular manner before his judges, and that of obtaining at least some attention if he succeeded in raising public opinion

in his favor, he did not hesitate. While the most clear-sighted had still doubts about that growing power, opinion, Beaumarchais had no doubts at all, and trusted to it boldly. No advocate dared to take his part against so redoubtable an adversary as Goëzman; he determined to be his own advocate, to plead his own cause, and he will be seen to plead it before all the world. He will trample under foot the regulations which order criminal prosecutions to be kept secret, which prevent the judges from being judged by the nation, and while preparations are being made for stifling him in the dark, he will introduce light every where, and will summon opinion to his aid; but, in order that public opinion may reply to the appeal of a man who is unknown, or only known unfavorably, it is necessary that this man should be able to attract readers, retain them, excite their passion, their indignation, their pity, and, at the same time, amuse them. The state of things was such that Beaumarchais was obliged, we may almost say under pain of death, to display a marvelous talent in giving to an affair which was of little interest in itself all the interest of a drama, a comedy, and a romance. If he contents himself with discussing the question in a becoming manner, if he confines himself to the facts of his case, if he can not contrive to connect with this case attractive social details and important political questions, if he is not, at the same time, very pathetic and very humorous; if, in a word, he does not have a popular success, he is lost: the new Parliament will be the more unmerciful toward him, inasmuch as he has shown himself mistrustful of the justice with closed doors of the new Parliament; and he has in perspective—*omnia citra mortem*.

Such an alternative, calculated as it was to paralyze an ordinary mind, was precisely the goad which urged Beaumarchais on, and gave him a kind of fever, which can be perceived in the rapid and continuous movement of his style, even in the argumentative portions.

In a legal point of view, his case was not so simple as was said by La Harpe and other writers, who, like him, have passed very lightly over the groundwork of the matter. To repel the accusation of calumny, he was obliged to prove that he had given money to Madame Goëzman; and, in this case, how

was he to repel the accusation of bribery? By endeavoring to establish that he did not wish to purchase the favor of the husband when he gave money to the wife, and that he only wished to obtain those audiences which were indispensable, which he could legitimately claim from the justice of the councilor, and on which his wife chose to set a pecuniary price. But the judge, at the commencement of the action, feeling convinced that his wife would not be compromised, endeavored, on his side, to prove the intention to bribe; accordingly, he did not fail to make the objection that it was scarcely probable a suitor in a case already heard, after the pleadings, on the eve of the decision, would have offered to the wife of the reporter 100 louis, a watch of the same value, and 15 louis—that is to say, more than 5000 francs—solely to obtain the privilege of offering a few observations to this reporter, who was impartial. Beaumarchais replied that he had offered nothing; that it had all been asked for; that the only question between him and Madame Goëzman had been with regard to audiences; and that the law dealt with facts, and not with probabilities. Then, turning the weapon of probability with deadly skill against the accuser himself, he showed that he was the accomplice of his wife, that he was very open to the suspicion of having sold his justice to the highest bidder, and that he was now endeavoring to reduce to silence and to annihilate the suitor whom he had already sacrificed. Beaumarchais' intention in paying Madame Goëzman might have appeared equivocal; nevertheless, one thing which resulted clearly from the debate was, that if there had been any idea of corruption, the thought had proceeded, not from Beaumarchais, but from the Goëzman family; that Beaumarchais, who knew neither the wife of the judge nor the bookseller who had spoken in her name, had only submitted to the conditions imposed upon him; and when the accused, breaking through all the artifices of the accuser; and forcing the witnesses who had been suborned either to retract or remain silent, and those who had been intimidated to speak, succeeded in bringing all the ignoble and odious side of the affair to light, when it was clearly shown that the wife of a councilor belonging to the new Parliament had basely misappropriated a miserable sum of fifteen

louis, and that the husband, in order to conceal the misappropriation, was pursuing to death the suitor who had asked to have his fifteen louis returned, the indignation of the public against Goëzman knew no bounds; they refused to look upon him as what he really, I think, was in the affair—a magistrate involved first of all by his wife, without being aware of it, in an awkward matter, and who afterward endeavored to get out of it *per fas et nefas*; they refused to admit that he was a stranger to the sordid action, which Beaumarchais, encouraged by the public, did not fear to speak of before the assembled Parliament as an act of swindling, and took a pleasure in covering the councilor Goëzman and the detested body to which he belonged with the same contempt, and the same accusations of dishonesty, venality, and injustice. This last was the dangerous point of the discussion; in touching upon it with a talent which exhibited equal audacity and prudence, by means of the most transparent allusions and the most deadly reticence, this Beaumarchais, so decried the day before, became suddenly the favored organ of the public anger, and the minister of the public vengeance, in connection with the *coup d'état* which had destroyed the old magistracy.

To the political interest of this action was joined the interest, mingled with surprise, which was excited by a man whose previous works had appeared mediocre, exhibiting the most original, the most varied talent, and giving to his judicial pleadings every kind of literary beauty and ornament. Enough has been said in regard to the literary merits of the Memorials against Goëzman, and we have no intention of dwelling on a worn-out subject. We shall only endeavor to study those celebrated polemics under their least-known aspect.

On reading the pleadings of Beaumarchais now, we are sometimes shocked by the excessive and insulting nature of his irony and invective. An eminent critic, who is an exquisite appreciator of the good and the beautiful, M. Villemain, admires the animated and versatile eloquence of these brilliant productions, but can not help exclaiming against certain portions, which, he says, shock our ideas of decency and truth.*

* Française Cours de Littérature—Tableau du XVIII^e siècle, III^e partie, 9^e leçon.

His contemporaries were, however, much less struck than ourselves with the violence of his language, which proceeded from two causes—the one general, the other particular.

At this period the press was not regulated, and, indeed, was scarcely tolerated by law; but it was active in spite of legislation, under the influence of a social necessity, which is more powerful than legislation, and, as a natural consequence, went beyond bounds. In looking over the licentious and unscrupulous works of every kind which circulated every where during the period we speak of, one would scarcely suspect that people were then living, as regarded the press, beneath the effect of a certain edict of 1769, which admitted no compromise, since it condemned simply *to death every author of writings tending to excite the public mind*. It was concluded from this that dull and tedious writers were alone certain not to be hanged, and every one wrote without paying more attention to the edict than if it had never existed. Laws, as has been said with reason, which are in open contradiction with the ideas and manners of a people, are soon looked upon by it as words, and as words only.

The same silent system which it was vainly endeavored to apply to public affairs, was not less vainly attempted in the matter of judicial proceedings. The law courts assumed to surround themselves with mystery, like the government, and at no epoch did more scandalous lawsuits produce more offensive and venomous libels. In the present day, when the system of publicity is gaining more and more extension—in the present day, when it is in general, and, with the exception of accidental restrictions, sanctioned by laws which regulate without stifling it, through constant use it gets to be used with moderation, and finds a salutary and permanent control in public opinion. When the doors of the tribunals are open to all, when every plaintiff and every defendant can say, or cause to be said publicly by his advocate, whatever is important to his case, and when there are journals to print the reports, the personal statements which were exchanged between exasperated suitors have no longer any meaning: they are looked upon as things apart; and if a few sometimes appear, they always exhibit a certain reserve. All polemic writings, on the contrary, which were

published in the eighteenth century, acquired from the very fact of their illegality an indecorousness and violence of style, which produced no astonishment, and seemed almost excused by the prohibition itself.

Another cause which made the public look upon Beaumarchais' incisive style with great indulgence was, that, if he was sometimes violent, his adversaries, whose now forgotten Memorials were read at the same time as his own, were remarkable for a violence which was even greater. He was happy enough to have to fight against enemies who, besides being very ridiculous, were also very much enraged and very malicious, in intention, at all events. "People laughed," says La Harpe, with justice, "to see them scarified, for they had daggers in their hands."

CHAPTER XII.

The Memorials of Beaumarchais' Adversaries.—Goëzman suspended.—The "Confrontation."—The "Great Bertrand."—Marin the "Gazetier de France."

THE Memorials of Beaumarchais' antagonists have become very rare. I procured them in order to get at the true aspect of this contest. In reading them, we perceive more clearly to how great a degree the man they were prosecuting possessed the genius of observation, with how much penetration he discerned, with what justness he reproduced the exact shade of platitude, cunning, or malice, which distinguished each of his enemies. It is seen, also, that, taken altogether, the moderation was on his side; that he did not begin to make desperate attacks until he had been himself attacked beyond bounds and without shame. Thus, in his first Memorial, he contents himself with exposing the facts clearly and precisely; he discusses the question of right; repels the accusation of Goëzman, but is very reserved in his language, and very chary of personalities. Hardly had he published his Memorial, than five furious adversaries rushed almost simultaneously upon him. It was not till then that he crossed swords, and took the offensive with a vigor which went on increasing until he had stretched

on the ground the five champions whom we are about to pass hastily in review.

The first who appears is Madame Goëzman, who writes under her husband's dictation, and throws at Beaumarchais' head a quarto of seventy-four pages, bristling with law terms and Latin quotations. Nothing can be more heavy or more anomalous than this language uttered by a lawyer who assumes the mask of a woman, and says, "I have taken in all the facts of this case, as *far as it is in the power of a woman to do so*;" or, "his recrimination must then be rejected, conformably to that law *which I have heard cited, neganda est accusatis, licentia criminandi*." Beaumarchais sums up the profound stupidity of this document very wittily when he exclaims, "An ingenuous woman is announced to me, and I am introduced to a German publicist." But if the Memorial is ridiculous in form, it is in substance extremely violent. "My mind"—it is thus that Madame Goëzman commences—"has been divided between astonishment, surprise, and horror in reading the libel which M. Caron has just spread abroad. The audacity of the author astonishes, the number and atrocity of his impostures excite surprise, the idea he gives of himself produces horror." When it is reflected that the honest lady who speaks thus has in her drawer the fifteen louis, the claiming of which excites her surprise, her astonishment, and her horror, one is inclined to excuse Beaumarchais for having indulged in some freedoms of speech in reference to her. It is well known, however, with what a mixture of ironical politeness and clenching argument he refutes, irritates, embarrasses, compliments, and confounds Madame Goëzman. Who has not burst into a laugh on reading the excellent comedy scene in which he represents himself conversing with her before the registrar? The scene is so amusing that one is inclined to take it for an imaginary sketch; it is nothing of the kind, however. The second Memorial, in which Madame Goëzman replies to Beaumarchais' statement, answers completely to the idea he gives us of her. Here we have no longer the husband speaking, but the lady herself. The tone is quite that of a woman in a passion: "I reproached M. Caron," she says, "when I met him, with being an *atrocious* man, and known to be such. The epithet appears

to have offended him ; I must therefore justify it." She divides her Memorial into *first, second, third atrocity*, and after this beautiful division concludes in these words : "That was not sufficient for you, atrocious man ; you dared, in the presence of the commissary, the registrar, and another person, to propose that I should go over to your side, to endeavor to render my husband odious in my sight. Your audacity extended even further : you dared to add (why am I obliged to recall speeches as insolent as they are humiliating to me ?)—you dared to add, I say, that you would at last make me hear you ; that your attentions would one day be not displeasing to me ; that . . . I dare not finish—I dare not call you what you are !"

This display of feminine vanity in so important an affair gives a notion of Madame Goëzman's strength of character. The amusing reply of Beaumarchais, when wishing to reassure the alarmed modesty of his fair enemy, is known. In defending himself from the charge of having made, in the presence of an austere registrar, pen in hand, observations of a nature that could only be indicated by dots, he reminded her that if, in the first instance, she called him an atrocious man, she only considered him *bien malin* after he had addressed her in the following terms : "I call upon you, Madame, to tell us instantly, without reflection and without preparation, why you state in all your interrogatories that you are thirty, when your countenance contradicts you, and shows that you are only eighteen." The judge, Goëzman, the accuser, who conducted the whole affair, did not make his appearance personally until the middle of the suit ; he had reckoned upon a rapid and easy triumph ; but the dispute became complicated by the introduction of facts which told very much against him. Beaumarchais, driven to extremities by the insinuation of poisoning, and the accusation of forgery, which the magistrate ventured to make in his wife's Memorials, took reprisals, and examined in his turn the life of Goëzman. After proving that, in the pending lawsuit, he had induced the bookseller Lejay to make a false affidavit, he discovered that some time previously, in order to conceal certain immoral conduct, Goëzman had signed a certificate of baptism under a false name, and denounced him, in his turn, before the Parliament as a forger. A public

cry was raised against him, the Maupeou Parliament was obliged to decree the personal suspension of one of its members, and a councilor of the grand chamber was seen to combine the position of accuser with that of the accused. The opening of his Memorial gives a very precise idea of the situation. "A cry has been raised," he says, "and an unfortunate combination of circumstances, together with the malicious pleasure of inculcating a magistrate at the present juncture, have instantly caused an infinity of echoes. The belief has spread like a secret contagion; a storm has been formed, which has settled above my head," &c. If Goëzman continued to speak in this style, he might inspire some interest; but, soon afterward, he is seen getting into a passion, and exhibits equal anger and bad faith toward a man who had only defended himself from his attacks. At this period of the suit, the councilor, even if we adopt the utterly improbable supposition that he had hitherto been deceived by his wife, could no longer doubt that the latter had asked for, received, and kept the fifteen louis. He must also have known very well that Beaumarchais had employed no corrupt artifice for transmitting them to her, other than that of accepting the intervention of an agent, who was representing her, and with whom she alone was acquainted; in spite of all this, he persisted more than ever in blackening his adversary's reputation, and, nevertheless, as he felt that his accusation (the venality of his wife once established) gave him an odious part to sustain, he concluded with false protestations of kindness, which his whole conduct disproved, and which only showed that he was conscious of being compromised.

The other three adversaries of Beaumarchais are not less useful to him than the first; one is a kind of speculative banker named Bertrand, who had, first of all, acted on his behalf, and had treated in his name with Madame Goëzman's friend, the bookseller. Alarmed at the accusation made by the councilor, and fearing to encounter his hatred, Bertrand, after in the first instance giving the true particulars, seemed disposed to take what appeared the stronger side, and was inclined to attack Beaumarchais for the benefit of Madame Goëzman. The first of Beaumarchais' Memorials took him up mildly and politely enough. Bertrand, whose fear rendered him very irri-

table against the accused, replied in an insulting paper, which bore this epigraph from the Psalms: "*Judica me, Deus, et discerne causam meam de gente non sanctâ, et ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me.*" Beaumarchais could only take his revenge on the "great Bertrand" by inflicting on him the celebrity of ridicule. Here, as every where, the shades of character are perfectly rendered. In vain does Bertrand attempt to deal blows of terrific force; in vain does he compose phrases in the style of the following: "A cynical rhetorician—a buffoon, an unblushing sophist, a deceptive painter, who finds in his own soul the filth with which he tarnishes the garment of innocence, malevolent from necessity and from taste, his hard, vindictive, implacable heart—becomes dizzy from its passing triumph, and stifles feeling humanity without remorse." Instead of returning rage for rage, Beaumarchais contented himself with giving Bertrand's portrait: he depicts him as a chatterer, greedy of gain, vacillating, at once timid and passionate, but more foolish even than malicious—such, in a word, as he exhibits himself in the four grotesque Memorials with which he has enriched this famous lawsuit.

The fourth champion who rushes headlong at Beaumarchais, and is transfixed at the first thrust, is a romance writer of the time, who was rather amusing in the funereal style, and who prided himself on having, to use his own words, "the rotundity of sentiment."* This was D'Arnaud-Baculard, who, to make himself agreeable to Goëzman, wrote a letter containing a false piece of information, and who, after being very politely corrected in the first Memorial of Beaumarchais, replied as follows: "Yes, I was on foot, and in the Rue de Condé I met M. Caron in his carriage—in *his* carriage!" And as Beaumarchais had said that D'Arnaud had a sombre expression, D'Arnaud became indignant, and exclaimed, "I had not a sombre expression, but I was deeply impressed: a sombre expression only becomes those persons who are *ruminating crime*, who are laboring to stifle remorse, and to do fresh injury. . . . Such persons may be followed step by step in their countenances; they are marching toward the eruption. . . . There are hearts in which I shudder to read; I measure within them

* *L'Embonpoint du sentiment.*

all the *sombre depths of hell*. At such a time I exclaim, 'Thou sleepest, Jupiter! Of what use, then, are thy thunderbolts?' "

It is seen that if D'Arnaud, in his turn, does no harm, it is not for want of good will. It will, perhaps, be interesting to reproduce here the answer of Beaumarchais; it will be seen with what justice he gives every one what he deserves, and what a charming serenity he displays in the contest. He commences by reproducing D'Arnaud's phrase in reference to the carriage:

" 'In his carriage,' you repeat, with a large note of admiration. Would not any one think, after the sad 'Yes, I was on foot,' and the large note of admiration which runs after my carriage, that you were the very personification of envy? but I, who know you to be a good sort of man, am aware that your phrase, 'in his carriage,' does not mean that you were sorry to see me in my carriage, but only sorry that I did not see you in yours.

" But console yourself, sir; the carriage in which I was riding had already ceased to belong to me when you saw me in it. The Count de la Blache had had it seized with all the rest of my property: men, entitled à *hautes armes*, with blue coats, cartouch belts, and muskets of menacing aspect, were keeping their eyes on it at my house, together with the whole of my furniture; and, in order to cause you, in spite of myself, the mortification of seeing me *in my carriage*, I had been obliged, the same day, to undergo that of soliciting from the *huissiers*, with my hat in one hand and a crown-piece in the other, permission to make use of it, which, if you will allow me to say so, I did every morning; and while I am now speaking to you with so much tranquillity, the same distress still exists in my house.

" How unjust people are! They envy and hate a man whom they think happy, and who would frequently give something to be in the place of the pedestrian who detests him on account of his carriage. Myself, for example—can any thing be more calculated than my present situation to throw me into a state of despair? But I am something like the cousin of Heloise: I may weep as much as I like, a laugh is sure to escape on one side or the other. That is what renders me so kind toward you. My philosophy consists in being, if possible, satisfied with myself, and in leaving the rest to go on as it may please God."

It was by passages such as the above, which abound in the Memorials against Goëzman, that Beaumarchais managed to destroy the prejudices which had been spread against him in the public mind, to disarm the envious, convert the hostile,

enlist the indifferent on his behalf, and interest every one in his cause. The page which I have just quoted appears to me one of the best as regards its naturalness, and the facility and variety of the *nuances*—above all if we add to it the following lines, which complete his answer to D'Arnaud, and, after the honey, give us the sting: "Forgive me, sir, if I have not answered, in a letter addressed to yourself alone, all the insults in your Memorial; forgive me if, after you have measured in my heart the sombre depths of hell, and cried out, '*Thou sleepest, Jupiter; of what use, then, are thy thunderbolts?*' I have replied but lightly to so much inflation; forgive me; you have been a schoolboy, no doubt, and you know that the best-filled balloon only requires the prick of a pin."

Of all Beaumarchais' adversaries, the one he has treated worst in his Memorials, the one against whom his pen is more often carried away to excess, is the journalist Marin; but it must also be said that, of all his enemies, this one, if not the most violent in words, was at least the most underhand, the most perfidiously venomous in his insinuations, and consequently the most irritating. When we read Marin's papers, we understand and excuse the fierceness of Beaumarchais. He was one of those *littérateurs* without talent, who, unable to become *some one*, endeavor obstinately to become *some thing*, and occasionally succeed by making a great stir in gaining a sort of position; but as their reputation is based upon nothing, has no foundation, either literary or moral, it totters and crumbles to pieces at the first shock. In the first instance a school-master, Marin had afterward obtained the lucrative privilege of publishing the "Gazette de France," in which he brought those paragraphs to perfection to which the name of an inmate of the poultry-yard is at present applied, and which were then called *marinades*. He was, moreover, the censor, the head of the office of printed books, and the agent of the Chancellor Maupeou for the composition and distribution of pamphlets intended to support the new Parliaments. It was asserted that, as he liked to have several strings to his bow, he also circulated secretly the pamphlets of Maupeou's adversaries, which were very much in request and very much prohibited. He also passed, with or without reason, for a usurer, and for the di-

rector of news-offices at which defamation was sold on the most reasonable terms. In a word, he was one of those *publicists* whose race has not, perhaps, entirely disappeared.

In his first Memorial Beaumarchais had contented himself with warding off the blow aimed by Marin. He did not introduce any thing personal or insulting into his statement of facts. Marin, convinced, like Bertrand and D'Arnaud, that the accused was lost, and that the best means of imposing silence upon him was by frightening him, replied in one of the most insulting Memorials. While Bertrand the speculator borrowed his epigraph from the Psalms, Marin the journalist, who had written a history of Saladin, and doubtless prided himself on being an Orientalist, displayed at the top of his paper a Persian maxim from the poet Sadi: "Give not thy rice to the serpent, for the serpent will sting thee." Beaumarchais is the serpent; but Beaumarchais will soon prove, in his own way, that it is Marin "who, instead of giving his rice to the serpent, takes its skin, envelops himself in it, and crawls with as much ease as if he had never done any thing else in his life." To sign his first Memorial, conjointly with himself, as the law demanded, Beaumarchais had only been able to find a poor, obscure advocate named Malbête. Marin, who aims at wit, takes advantage of the circumstance, and opens with the following sentence: "A libel has been distributed at the gates of Paris, and sold publicly, bearing the signature, Beaumarchais-Malbête." This was neat enough, but it was imprudent; for the journalist, in making this point, was venturing upon a kind of war in which his adversary was an acknowledged master. Accordingly, a reply in the same tone, but with more smartness, was not long coming. "The *Gazetier de France* complains of the falseness of the calumnies circulated in a paper which, he says, is signed Beaumarchais-Malbête, and he undertakes to justify himself by a little manifesto signed Marin, *qui n'est pas Malbête.*"

Every one has read the fine opening of the fourth Memorial, the most remarkable of all. We will only quote the paragraphs in which he asks Providence to give him Marin for his enemy. "I should desire," he says, "the intellect of this man to be heavy and dull; I should desire his stupid malice to have

long procured for him two things, which, until his time, had been considered incompatible: public hatred and public contempt. I would ask, above all, that, unfaithful to his acquaintances, ungrateful to his friends, odious to authors in his censorship, nauseating to readers in his writings, terrible to borrowers in his usury, hawking about forbidden books, acting as a spy on persons who receive him into their society, plundering strangers who intrust their affairs to him, tyrannizing over unfortunate booksellers in order to enrich himself, he should be such a man that, in public opinion, it would be sufficient to be accused by him in order to be presumed honest, to be supported by him in order to be at once suspected: give me Marin."

CHAPTER XIII.

Composition of the Memorials.—Voltaire and the Memorials.—The Goëzman Case abroad.—An anonymous Letter.—Councilor Gin.—Madame du Deffand to Horace Walpole.—The Sentence.

WITH the exception of Gudin, the persons who came to the aid of Beaumarchais in his contest with Goëzman were not literary men by profession; he was assisted by his relations and his most intimate friends. First of all we have old M. Caron, who, though now seventy-five, still gives his advice with regard to his son's Memoirs; then Julie, whose literary talents are at present known, makes her appearance in her brother's pleadings; M. de Miron, Beaumarchais' brother-in-law, a man of wit, of whom we have spoken elsewhere, furnishes notes for the satirical portion. Gudin, who was very strong upon ancient history, helps him to compose some of the bits of erudition; and his heavy, pale prose becomes pliant and colored under his friend's pen. A very distinguished young barrister, named Falconnet, supervises the author's work when he is dealing with questions of law. Finally, a Provençal physician named Gardanne directs specially the *dissection* of the two Provençaux, his compatriots, Marin and Bertrand.

Such is the little phalanx which Madame Goëzman, in her Memorials, calls an "infamous clique," and which the "great

Bertrand," less ferocious and more sensible, calls simply the "joyful band." These witty *bourgeois* are all, indeed, joyful enough, grouped around Beaumarchais, combating with him against a host of enemies, and not without incurring some personal dangers, for Julie, in particular, was formally denounced by Goëzman. A printed representation from this judge, directed specially against her, is in existence, but it led to nothing; all of them, for the rest, had undergone interrogations, confrontations, and re-examinations; they were none the worse for it, and their gayety kept up the ardor of the man to whom they were devoted body and soul. The head-quarters were not at Beaumarchais'. Since the loss of the La Blache suit he had broken up his establishment; he had placed his sister Julie as a free-boarder at the abbey of Saint-Antoine; his father was living with an old lady, a friend of theirs; two other sisters were in a convent in Picardy. Although his affairs were very much out of order, he continued, nevertheless, to pension all his family. As for himself, what with the bailiffs of the Count de la Blache and Goëzman's prosecution, he lived in a flying camp. Always striving, always hurrying from one point to another, he used to concert and prepare with his friends his means of defense and attack in the house of one of his sisters, who had married Lépine, the celebrated watchmaker, and who lived just in the neighborhood of the Palais de Justice. There all the particulars were collected, all the notes made, and the materials for each Memorial discussed.

It now only remains for us to endeavor to represent the attitude of the public in this struggle between a private individual and a detested Parliament, which they identified with Goëzman. In reckoning on the assistance he might derive from circumstances, the intrepid suitor had not been wrong. After the appearance of the second Memorial, his cause had become, as was said at the time, the cause of the nation, and he found himself the object of a perpetually increasing sympathy. This was kept up by the very duration of the contest, the result of which was retarded by a variety of incidents, and delayed for seven months, from August, 1773, till February, 1774. During these seven months, in the absence of more

important events, the eyes of all Paris, France, we may even say Europe, were fixed upon Beaumarchais and his lawsuit.

It is known with what ardent curiosity and interest Voltaire followed this affair from his retreat at Ferney. Although he had at first sided with the Chancellor Maupeou, he now deserted the ministerial flag, and underwent the influence of Beaumarchais' Memorials.

"What a man!" he writes to D'Alembert; "he unites every thing—humor, seriousness, argument, gayety, force, pathos, every kind of eloquence, and he seeks for none, and he confounds all his adversaries, and he gives lessons to his judges. His naïveté enchants me. I forgive him his imprudence and his petulance."

"I am afraid," he says elsewhere, "that this brilliant, hare-brained fellow is at bottom right in spite of every one. What roguery, oh heaven! What horrors! What degradation in the country! What a shock for the Parliament!"* The phlegmatic Horace Walpole, although less affected than Voltaire, also yields to the influence of the Memorials. "I have received," he writes to Madame du Deffand, "Beaumarchais' 'Memorials;' I am at the third volume, and they amuse me very much. The man is very skillful; he reasons correctly, and has a great deal of wit; his pleasantry is sometimes very good; but he delights in it too much. In fine, I can understand, considering the party spirit at present among you, this affair causing a great sensation. I was forgetting to tell you with what horror your mode of administering justice struck me. Is there a country in the world in which this Madame Goëzman would not have been severely punished? Her deposition is shameless to a fearful extent. Are persons allowed, then, with you to lie, to prevaricate, to contradict themselves, to abuse their opponents in so desperate a manner? What

* *Vide* Voltaire's correspondence from Dec., 1773, to April, 1774, in which he speaks incessantly of Beaumarchais. If La Harpe is to be believed, he even thought of him so much as to experience some jealousy, for he is said to have written as follows in reference to the Memorials: "They exhibit much wit; I think, however, that more is required to write 'Zaïre and Mérope.'" This sentence, quoted by La Harpe, is not found in the published correspondence.

has become of this creature and her villainous husband? Answer me, I beseech you!"*

In Germany the effect was not less than in England. Göthe has related to us, himself, how at Frankfort, in a circle where Beaumarchais' Memorials were being read aloud, a young girl gave him the idea of transforming the Clavijo episode into a drama.† At Paris, the impression they produced was naturally stronger; Goëzman's adversary had for him not only all the young men and women, but all the former advocates of the ancient Parliament, and all their connections. Even more, for such was the levity of mind in official regions, that Louis XV. himself found amusement in the work; it made Madame du Barry laugh, and she had "proverbs" played at her house, in which the confrontation of Madame Goëzman with Beaumarchais was represented on the stage. Maupeou alone did not laugh when he thought of the consequences of this success, disastrous as it was to a scheme which had cost him so many efforts, and had exposed him to so much animosity. The enthusiasm which this judicial comedy then excited is expressed in a lively manner in the two following letters, which were addressed to Beaumarchais by the wife of one of the Presidents of the old Parliament, Madame de Meinières;‡ they contain, moreover, a witty analysis of the fourth Memorial, which determines me to give them almost entire:

"I have finished this astonishing Memorial, sir. Yesterday I cursed the visits which interrupted me in such delightful reading, although, when the persons had gone, I thanked them for having prolonged my pleasure by interrupting it. Blessed, on the contrary, forever be the '*grand cousin*,' the '*sacristan*,' the '*publicist*,' and all the worthies who have called forth the narrative of your journey to Spain. You ought to reward these persons. Your best friends could not have put you in so good a light by their eulogiums and their affection, as your enemies have done by forcing you to speak of yourself. Grandison, the most perfect hero of a romance, does not reach up to your ankle. When we follow you to this M. Clavijo's, to M. Whall's, in the park of Aranjuez, to the ambassador's, to the king's, we be-

* *Vide* Madame du Deffand's letters to Horace Walpole, vol. iii., p. 90, edition of 1812.

† *Vide* Göthe's Autobiography.

‡ Madame de Meinières had a certain literary reputation. She had translated Hume's "History of England."

come as anxious, as excited, and as indignant as yourself. What a magic pencil is yours, sir! what energy of thought and expression! what rapidity of wit! what an incredible compound of warmth and prudence, courage and sensibility, genius and grace! I had the honor to see Mademoiselle d'Ossun* yesterday, and we spoke of you and your Memorial; what else can be spoken of? She told me that you had called upon her. If you want to see her, she comes pretty regularly every Sunday to the Pavilions,† and I offer to bring you together there. She is a girl of the greatest merit, whose head and heart are excellent; but *apropos* of heart and head, what were you doing with them at Madame de Saint Jean's? You appeared to be displaying all the qualities of an agreeable man, which is not the way to be most attractive to an old woman like me. I saw, well enough, that you possessed wit, talent, confidence, and the art of pleasing in conversation, but I should never have perceived in you, sir, a true father of a family, and the sublime author of your four Memorials.‡ I must be very stupid, and the points which compose the brilliancy of a circle like that of this charming woman must dazzle and fatigue a savage of my kind so as to prevent her distinguishing them.

"Receive my thanks for the enthusiasm which you excite in your readers, and the assurance of the genuine esteem with which I have the honor to be, sir, &c.,

GUICHARD DE MEINIÈRES.

"18th February, 1774."

"Whatever be the result of your quarrel with so many adversaries, I congratulate you, sir, on having had it; it will, in any case, prove that you are one of the most honorable men in the world, since after searching through your life it has been impossible to show that you are a villain, and assuredly you have made yourself known as a most eloquent man in every kind of eloquence belonging to this century. Your prayer to the Supreme Being is a masterpiece of the sublime and the comic, the astounding, ingenious, novel intermixture of which produces the greatest effect. I confess, with Madame Goëzman, that you are somewhat *malin*; and, following her example, I forgive you, for you *malices* are delightful. I hope, sir, you have not a sufficiently bad opinion of me to pity me for reading a hundred and eight pages when they are written by you. I begin by devouring them, then I retrace my steps; I stop now at a passage worthy

* The sister of the Marquis d'Ossun, the French ambassador in Spain, who had been very obliging to Beaumarchais during his stay at Madrid.

† The Pavilions of Chaillot.

‡ This sentence shows what a feeling of surprise the Memorials produced on those who had hitherto only known Beaumarchais as a very gay and somewhat foppish man of the world; "*ayant*" (to employ the delicate and polite expression of Madame de Meinières) "*de la confiance*."

of Demosthenes, now at another superior to Cicero, and at last at a thousand as humorous as Molière; I am so afraid of finishing and being unable to read any thing else afterward, that I recommence each paragraph to give you time enough to produce your fifth Memorial, in which we shall no doubt find your confrontation with M. Goëzman; I must only beg of you to do me the favor to give me notice the night before the bookseller sends copies to the widow La Marche; she is the person who has always supplied them to me. I take several of them at a time, for ourselves and for *our friends*;* and I am enraged when, from not knowing they have appeared, I send too late, and am told in reply that I must wait until the following day."

There was a grand rivalry as to who should send Beaumarchais information, advice, congratulations, and encouragement. Many persons even carried their good intentions so far as to send him, in their modesty, Memorials ready written, as if his wit could not do without their assistance. One of these correspondents, who did not sign his name, but who appears to have been a member of the old Parliament, sent him the plan of a Memorial, impressed upon him the necessity of secrecy, and terminated as follows: "The machine is coming to pieces, thanks to you. Is not this the time for striking the grand blow? I refer it all to your prudence. From your writings, I think you as honest a man as myself, which I would not say of every one; I fear nothing." And the letter is without a signature! What a Bayard is this correspondent! The world is full of these heroic persons who exhort others to deeds of daring from beneath the veil of the anonymous.

Beaumarchais was not wanting in audacity, but he did not wish to drive the Parliament to extremities; he knew that public favor was fleeting and inconstant. The Prince de Conti, his warmest protector, had said to him, "If you have the misfortune to come under the hands of the executioner, I shall be obliged to abandon you." What he had to do, then, was to preserve and maintain the power he derived from the opposition, without exasperating his judges, who were already in a state of irritation; always to suit his tone to the rank of the persons he attacked; and to be able when necessary, as has been wittily said, to strike while kneeling. This is exactly

* *Our friends* were the members of the old Parliament.

what he did, and with marvelous tact, after an incident which increased still more the interest he had already inspired. A colonel of cavalry, whom Maupeou had transformed *ex abrupto* into a magistrate, the President de Nicolai, an intimate friend of Goëzman's, met Beaumarchais in the Salle des Pas Perdus, and insulted him by ordering the officers to turn him out. Beaumarchais accordingly made a complaint against the insulter. The first president sent for him, and invited him to withdraw his complaint. He consented to do so; but in his last Memorial, with external signs of respect, beneath which disdain can be seen, he explains publicly why he consented to forgive M. de Nicolai. In a short time his influence became such that his suitor, who had been treated with so much contempt by his judges at the commencement of the action, and who had not been suffered to make his accusations in the ordinary legal forms, had only to point out in his Memorials those whom he considered his most violent enemies, in order to make them yield to his challenge. One of them, a councilor of the grand chamber, named Gin, addressed to him a sort of apology, six pages in length, from which I extract some passages, which show how the pride of the judge disappeared before the popularity of the accused.

"I have read your last Memorial, sir," writes Councilor Gin; "I yield to your prayers by ceasing to be your judge; but, in order to avoid all misunderstanding as to the motives, which have hitherto prevented me from taking this determination, and those which lead me to do so at present, I think I ought to inform you and the public of these motives."

And, after a long explanation of his conduct, this magistrate, who was at first Beaumarchais' declared enemy, terminates as follows:

"I think I have proved, sir, that I have even now all the impartiality necessary for judging M. and Madame de Goëzman and yourself; but your attacks have been so multiplied, that, if I were to appear as your judge, I should have reason to fear the public might suspect me of some unfavorable opinion toward you. To this delicacy I sacrifice my individual sentiments; and, in order to give you a fresh proof of my impartiality, I declare to you, sir, that I require no other reparation for the imputations contained in your Memorials than that of *giving publicity* to this letter, which I forward, at the same

time, to the first president. I am, sir, with all the sentiments due to you, your very humble, &c.,

GIN.*

"Feb. 15, 1774."

What a singular substitution of parts! The judge pleads before the accused, and the accused is about to teach dignity to the judge, by writing on his side to the first president a letter, from which I borrow only the following lines:

"Monseigneur,—I have the honor to address to you a copy of the *apologetic* letter I have received from M. Gin. My profound respect for the court prevents me giving this letter the publicity which this magistrate seems at first to have desired it should receive, convinced as I am that when he reflects upon it again, he will be obliged to me for renouncing all idea of printing it with my commentary."

What, indeed, can be more strange than this step of a magistrate, who himself solicits an accused person, whose Memorials constitute an infraction of the law, and were soon afterward condemned to be burned, to grant him a place in these Memorials to justify himself with the public! Who does not recognize in this a brilliant testimony to the power which Beaumarchais derived from public opinion, which he had contrived to gain, and which he opposed like a buckler to his enemies.

However, if fear acted on some of the magistrates of the Maupeou Parliament, hatred and fear ruled alternately in the hearts of the majority, who saw with delight the hour of vengeance approaching. The day for giving judgment arrived at last, on the 26th February, 1774, amid universal expectation.

* This is the same magistrate who admits to Beaumarchais the influence exercised by the public rumors on his decision in the La Blache suit, out of which the Goëzman suit sprang. The admission is worth preserving. "Whether from reason," he writes, "*or from the impressions which the public rumors, even though calumnious, have left on people's minds, and from which it is impossible to keep free*, I will not conceal from you that the combination of peculiarities connected with your deed, your letters, and your whole affair determined me to 'support' the letters of rescission." Councilor Gin means by this that he had expressed his opinion that the statement of accounts between Paris du Verney and Beaumarchais should be declared null. This opinion, without being substantially more advantageous for him, was less offensive in form than that of Goëzman, which had been adopted by the Parliament, and in virtue of which the act in question had been declared, indirectly, to be a forgery.

"We are expecting to-day," writes Madame du Deffand to Walpole, "a great event: Beaumarchais' judgment. M. de Monaco has invited him this evening to read us a comedy of his composition, entitled 'The Barber of Seville.' The public are infatuated with the author, who is receiving judgment while I am writing. It is expected that the judgment will be severe, and it may happen that, instead of supping with us, he may be condemned to exile, or even to the pillory. I will tell you to-morrow."

Such is the amount of interest Madame du Deffand took in people! What a pity for her if the accused had been condemned to the pillory! She would have lost the reading of "The Barber." She did lose it, all the same; the judges deliberated for so long a time (for twelve hours) that Beaumarchais addressed to the Prince of Monaco the following unpublished letter, which forms a pendant to that of Madame du Deffand:

"Beaumarchais, infinitely sensible of the honor which the Prince de Monaco has been kind enough to do him, sends this acknowledgment from the court, where he has been kept since six in the morning, where he has been questioned at the bar, where he is waiting for his judgment, for which he has had to wait a long time; but, whatever turn affairs may take, Beaumarchais, who is surrounded by his relations at the present moment, can not escape from them, whether he has compliments of congratulation or of condolence to receive. He begs the Prince de Monaco to do him the favor of reserving his kindness for another day. He has the honor to assure him of his very respectful gratitude.

"Saturday, February 26, 1774."

When he wrote this letter, Beaumarchais, after entering the court, where he had seen all his judges pass before him, had been just submitted, according to custom, to his last interrogatory; the preceding night had been devoted by him to the settlement of his affairs. It appears that he had decided upon killing himself in case of being condemned to the pillory.* Seeing that there was no end to the deliberation, he withdrew to the residence of Madame Lépine, his sister, went to bed, and enjoyed a profound sleep.

* So, at least, it appears from a passage in one of his Memorials, in his appeal from the judgment in the La Blache case.

"He slept," says Gudin, in his manuscript, "and his judges kept awake, tormented by their anger and divided among themselves. They deliberated with tumult; expressed their opinions with rage; wished to punish the author of the Memorials; foresaw the clamor of the public, who were ready to disavow them, and filled the place with their cries of contention."

They at last determined upon a sentence by which they hoped to satisfy the public and at the same time avenge themselves. They condemned Madame Goëzman to the penalty of *blame*, and ordered her to restore the fifteen louis, which were to be distributed to the poor. Her husband was placed "out of court"—a sentence which was equivalent to the other in the case of a magistrate, and which forced him to resign his office.* Beaumarchais was also condemned to the penalty of "blame."

This penalty was one of infamy, and answered as nearly as possible to what is now called "civic degradation." It rendered the condemned incapable of occupying any public function, and he had to receive his sentence on his knees before the court, the president saying to him, "The court blames thee, and declares thee infamous." Beaumarchais was awaked to hear the result:

"He rose tranquilly," says Gudin, "equally the master of his movements and his intellect. 'Let us see,' he said, 'what there remains to be done.' We went out together to his sisters; I did not know whether they were not waiting about the house to arrest him. I was ignorant of his designs, and did not wish to leave him. After having gone some distance, in order to be certain that he was not being followed, he took leave of me, and made an appointment with me for the next day in the asylum he had chosen; for it was to be feared

* This action, so imprudently commenced, and so violently followed up by Goëzman, brought misfortune to him. He lost his place and his reputation. After being sacrificed by his colleagues, he retired into obscurity; and, twenty years afterward, I find his name on the list of persons decapitated on the 7th Thermidor, two days before the fall of Robespierre. This is plainly the man. Louis-Valentin Goëzman, formerly Councillor in the Maupeou Parliament; convicted, according to the polite formula of the time, of "having rendered himself the enemy of the people." He figured in the same cart-load with André Chénier. The Reign of Terror might well have spared Goëzman; it had plenty of more interesting men to devour, but nothing came amiss to it.

that, in order to carry out the sentence, the court might send for him to his own house ; but this sentence had been so ill received by the multitude assembled at the door of the chamber, the judges had been so hooted on rising, although many of them escaped by corridors which were unknown to the public, they saw so many signs of discontent, that they were not tempted to carry into execution a sentence which only drew upon them the 'blame' of every one."

The reader knows what a brilliant triumph followed this sentence, the execution of which was prevented by Beaumarchais' popularity. All Paris called at his house, and the Prince de Conti and the Duke de Chartres gave him a brilliant *fête* on the morrow of the very day on which the Tribunal had attempted to brand him. M. de Sartines said to him, "It is not enough for you to be 'blamed,' it is also necessary to be modest." When such discrepancies take place in society, it is much diseased. Let us add to these particulars, which are known, one of a private and delicate nature, which I borrow from Gudin's manuscript :

"He had," says Gudin, "consolations more touching still than those of friendship. His celebrity gained for him the attention of a woman who was endowed with a sensitive heart and a firm disposition, fitted to sustain him in the cruel combats in which he had still to engage. She did not know him, but her heart, moved by the perusal of his memorials, was attracted to that of this celebrated man. She desired ardently to see him. I was with him when, making music her pretext, she sent a man with whom she was acquainted, and who was also acquainted with Beaumarchais, to beg him to lend her his harp for a few minutes. Such a request, under such circumstances, revealed her meaning. Beaumarchais understood it—appreciated it, and replied, 'I never lend my harp ; but if she will come with you, I will hear her and she can hear me.' She came : I was a witness of their first interview. I have already said that it was difficult to see Beaumarchais without loving him. What impression must he not have produced when he was covered with the applause of all Paris—when he was looked upon as the defender of oppressed liberty—the avenger of the public. It was still more difficult to resist the looks, the voice, the bearing, and the conversation of this young woman ; and the attraction which each of them exercised upon the other at first sight increased from hour to hour, from the variety of their charms, and the number of excellent qualities which each of them displayed in proportion as the acquaintance increased. Their hearts were united from this moment by a bond which nothing could

break, and which love, esteem, confidence, time, and law rendered indissoluble."*

These popular and princely ovations, this happiness of the heart, more sweet still, doubtless repaid Beaumarchais for the blow he had received from the Parliament; the blow, however, was a severe one. Indeed, the Maupeou Parliament could not long survive this act of anger and vengeance. In inflicting civil death on a man whom public opinion carried in triumph, it had inflicted death on itself. The sleeping opposition awoke, and fell upon it with redoubled fury. Pamphlets, in prose and verse, acquired a new vivacity.† It lingered on for some months longer, amid public contempt; the end of Louis XV.'s reign hastened its fall, and one of the first acts of Louis XVI. was to re-establish the old Parliament; but, until the occurrence of this event, which might still have been at some distance, the terrible sentence against Beaumarchais existed with all its consequences. He found his career destroyed; two lawsuits lost at the same time, one of which had ruined him in fortune and honor, while the other, although it replaced him in public esteem, had destroyed him in a legal point of view, were weighing upon him with all their weight.

* The charming person of whom Gudin here speaks, and who became afterward Beaumarchais' third wife, was named Marie-Thérèse Emilie Willermawlaz. She was, as we have already said elsewhere, of Swiss origin, and belonged to a distinguished family in Charmey. I have seen a large portrait of her, in which she is represented with the costume in which she perhaps appeared on the day of the interview, for she wears the famous plume of feathers *à la quesaco*, and looks charming in this head-dress. Some of her letters, which we shall quote in their proper place, will prove, moreover, that she was a very remarkable woman, from her intellect, wit, and disposition.

† By one of those *jeux de mots*, in the Parisian taste, it was said, in allusion to the Goëzman prosecution, "Louis Quinze destroyed the old Parliament, quinze louis will destroy the new." Bachaumont, without quoting it, mentions a very popular satirical ballad, in which all the personages and incidents of this suit were introduced. I found this ballad among Julie's papers, and as there are two copies of it, in her handwriting, with different readings, and as she often devoted herself to this slightly burlesque kind of poetry, I am inclined to think that she is the author of the ballad in question. Whoever has read the memorials against Goëzman will recognize in this song a sufficiently good caricature of all Beaumarchais' adversaries.

He had to obtain the reconsideration of these two suits; to start with, it was necessary to obtain the reversal of the last sentence.

To apply quietly for this reversal to the Council of State was to expose himself to almost certain refusal; to publish any fresh writings was impossible. Louis XV., although he had been sometimes amused by the Memorials against Goëzman, was nevertheless very much annoyed by the agitation produced by the discussion. He had had the dangerous suitor formally enjoined by M. de Sartines to preserve an absolute silence for the future; but the time allowed for appealing against the decision was slipping by, and the sentence was about to become irrevocable. Happily for Beaumarchais, his fortune, always a strange one, ordained that Louis XV., forming his opinion of him from the very talent he had shown in the Goëzman affair, thought he had need of him. As kings could then, by means of "letters of relief," relieve persons from the effect of the lapse of time allowed for repeals having passed by, he promised to enable him to regain his civil position if he fulfilled with zeal and success a difficult mission to which he attached the greatest importance—and the conqueror of the Maupeou Parliament started for London in the capacity of secret agent.

CHAPTER XIV.

Beaumarchais' secret Missions.—The "Journalist in Armor."—Value of Madame du Barry's Honor.—Death of Louis XV.—The young King.—More Libels.—The confidential Agent.

THE history of Beaumarchais' secret mission is instructive, from the light it throws upon the system of absolute government. The weak sides of free governments have been sufficiently called attention to during the last few years, owing to the abuse which has been made of liberty, and the sad consequences of this abuse, to render it, perhaps, interesting for us to examine the reverse of the medal, and study minutely what was taking place behind the scenes of government at a time

when publicity, discussion, and responsibility were strangers to it. It will, perhaps, not be useless to show what importance was then attached to the most miserable trifles, what a waste of the public money took place under the shelter of ministerial irresponsibility, through what complicated roads a man who had been visited with an unjust sentence was obliged to pass in order to get restored to his former position; and as, on the other hand, this same man, after being sentenced to civil death by a tribunal, could become the private agent and correspondent of two kings and their ministers, and succeed, little by little, through making himself useful in small manœuvres of secret diplomacy, not only in regaining his civil rights, but also in getting an important affair, worthy of himself and his intelligence, intrusted to him, and in exercising in the shade a considerable influence, of which hitherto little has been known, on a great event.

It will be remembered that Louis XV. had imposed an absolute silence on Beaumarchais, which prevented him making any effectual application for a reversal of his sentence. One day, when speaking of the latter with La Borde, he said to him, "It is asserted that your friend has great talent for negotiation; if he could be employed with success and secrecy in a matter which interests me, his affairs would profit by it." Now the following was the grave subject which gave uneasiness to the old king.

There was then in London an adventurer from Burgundy named Théveneau de Morande, who, to escape the consequences of the disorderly life he had led in his own country, had taken refuge in England, where, finding himself without resources, he dealt in scandal, and composed gross libels, which were introduced clandestinely into France, and in which he defamed, insulted, and calumniated, without distinction, all names, if ever so little known, which came under his pen. Among other works, he had published, under the impudent title of "The Journalist in Armor,"* a collection of atrocities which perfectly corresponded with the impudence of his title. Profiting by the fear he inspired, he from time to time sent applications for money across the Channel to those who were

* "Le Gazetier cuirassé."

afraid of his attacks. It appears, even, that he attempted to obtain hush money from Voltaire, but without success; the philosopher of Ferney was not to be frightened by so little, and he contented himself with inflicting publicly on "The Journalist in Armor" the expression of his contempt: Morande, in a word, was pursuing, with less celebrity, the trade which, in the sixteenth century, had made Aretino surnamed the "Scourge of Princes." To a practitioner of this kind Madame du Barry was a gold mine; accordingly, he had written to this lady to announce to her the forthcoming publication, except in case of a handsome bonus, of an interesting work, founded upon her life, and of which he sent her the prospectus, bearing the following very attractive title for a certain class of amateurs, "*Mémoires secrets d'une femme publique.*" Any other person than Madame du Barry might have disdained the insults of this pamphleteer, or have prosecuted him in the English courts; it can be understood that Madame du Barry was not able to take either of these courses; alarmed and enraged, she communicated her anger and her fear to Louis XV., who began by applying to the King of England for Morande's extradition. The English government replied that, if it was not desired to prosecute this libeler, it would offer no opposition to the removal of a man who was so unworthy the protection of the English laws, but that it could not take part in his removal, and that it could not even permit it except on one condition, that it should be accomplished with the greatest secrecy, and in such a manner as not to wound the susceptibility of the national character. The French ministry accordingly sent a brigade of police agents to seize Morande secretly; but the latter was cunning and active; he had correspondents in Paris, occupying, perhaps, high positions, who had warned him of the expedition, and, not content with taking measures for rendering it abortive, he had denounced it in the London journals, at the same time giving himself out as a political exile, whom his persecutors dared to follow, even on to the soil of liberty, thus, for the sake of an ignoble trade, violating the generous hospitality which England grants so nobly to the vanquished of all parties. The English public became excited, and when the French police

agents arrived, they were pointed out to the people, who felt it their duty to throw them into the Thames. They had only time to conceal themselves, and went back as quickly as possible, very much frightened, and swearing they would never be caught at such a thing again.

Proud of this success, Morande hastened the publication of the scandalous work he had prepared. Three thousand copies were printed, and ready to be sent off to Holland and Germany, to be afterward circulated throughout France. Being no longer able to get the author into his power, Louis XV. had sent different agents to treat with him; but Morande kept himself on the *qui vive*, would not allow any one to approach him, and, although nothing but a shameless adventurer, assumed before the English people the character of an avenger of public morality. Such was the state of things when the king, having exhausted his means, proposed to Beaumarchais, through M. de la Borde, to start for London, to treat with the "Journalist in Armor," and purchase his silence and the destruction of his "Memoirs of Madame du Barry." A mission to protect the honor of a woman who had so little to protect as Madame du Barry, was not, it must be admitted, one of a very high order; but, besides the fact that in this case the interest of the King of France was unfortunately mixed up with that of his too celebrated mistress, we must, before casting the stone at Beaumarchais, take a just view of his situation. It must be remembered that, after being branded with disgrace by magistrates of no reputation, and who had been judges in their own case, he found his only means of reinstating himself paralyzed by the express order of an all-powerful king, who could open or shut to him the roads by which the reversal of the sentence was to be obtained; who could restore to him his credit, his fortune, and his civil rights; and this all-powerful king was asking him a personal service, and assuring him of his gratitude if he performed it. The period at which we live is, without doubt, infinitely praiseworthy from the austerity of its principles, and, above all, of its practices. However, it is not very evident to us that, under similar circumstances, no one could be found to run after the mission which Beaumarchais contented himself with accepting. The brilliant writer

accordingly went to London in March, 1774, and, as the celebrity of his real name might have interfered with the success of his operations, he took the false one of Ronac, an anagram of Caron. In a few days he had gained the confidence of the libel-writer, had completed a negotiation which had been dragging on for eighteen months, and, reappearing at Versailles with a copy of the *Memoirs* which caused so much alarm, and the manuscript of another libel by the same author, received the king's orders for a final arrangement. Louis XV., surprised at the rapidity of his success, expressed his satisfaction to him, and referred him to the Duke d'Aiguillon to arrange about Morande's terms. The minister, who was violently attacked in the libel, cared much less about destroying it than about ascertaining exactly what the author's connections were in France. Hence arose a scene with Beaumarchais, which does honor to him, and which we must reproduce, in order to show how he understood, and what limits he assigned to, the unenviable part which his situation caused him to accept.

"Too happy," writes Beaumarchais, in an unpublished paper, addressed to Louis XVI., after the death of his predecessor, "too happy to succeed in suppressing these libels without their being made a means of casting suspicion on all persons who may happen to be displeasing, I refused to play the infamous part of informer, to become the instrument of a perhaps general prosecution, and to light up a war of bastilles and dungeons. The Duke d'Aiguillon, in his anger, communicated my refusal to the king; his majesty, before condemning me, wished to know my reasons; I had the courage to reply that I could find means of putting the king beyond uneasiness with regard to all kinds of libels, both for the present and the future, but that I should think I was dishonoring myself completely if, on the false indication or perfidious confession of a man of such bad repute as the author, I were to accuse in France persons who, perhaps, had had no more connection than myself with those unworthy productions. Finally, I begged the king not to intrust me with this odious commission, for which I was less fitted than any one. The king consented to yield to my reasons; but the Duke d'Aiguillon retained a resentment toward me for my refusal, of which he gave me the most insulting proofs on the occasion of my second journey. I was so disheartened that, without a very particular order from the king, I should have given it all up. Not only did the king wish me to return to London, but he sent me back there as his confidential commissioner, to an-

swer, in my own name, for these libels being entirely destroyed by fire."

The manuscript and the three thousand copies of the "Memoirs of Madame du Barry" were indeed burned in the environs of London, in a plaster furnace; but it could hardly be imagined what this interesting operation cost. To purchase the silence of Morande, and preserve the reputation of Madame du Barry from the attacks of his pen, the French government gave this adventurer 20,000 francs in ready money, besides an annuity of 4000 francs. It has been erroneously asserted that this pension of 4000 francs was suppressed during the following reign. It was not merely a pension, it was an annuity duly secured. The pamphleteer had taken his precautions, and his annuity was therefore not suppressed. However, on his application, Louis XVI.'s ministry bought half of this annuity back from him for a fresh sum of 20,000 francs.* It must be confessed that Madame du Barry's honor was estimated very much above its value. For the rest, this Morande had contrived to make himself useful. "He was an audacious poacher," writes Beaumarchais to M. de Sartines; "I have made him an excellent game-keeper." At a later period, during the American war, he supplied the French government with information of interest.

The operation had been more profitable to the libeler than to Louis XV.'s agent. While the former received 20,000 francs, and a deed giving him an annuity of 4000 francs, Beaumarchais, on returning to Versailles to receive the thanks of the old king, and preparing to remind him of his promises, found him dying. Some days afterward Louis XV. was dead.

* The error we have just pointed out occurs in "Michaud's Biographie Universelle," in the article devoted to Morande. This article contains several other errors; it contains one statement especially to the effect that, after the death of Louis XV., Morande had the audacity to publish the work whose suppression had been purchased from him so dearly. This is not accurate. Morande was then dependent upon Beaumarchais, who would not have permitted such a breach of faith. The anonymous work, entitled "Anecdotes sur la Comtesse de Barry," which appeared in 1776, is not by Morande; he is even very much abused in this book, which Barbier's "Dictionnaire des Ouvrages Anonymes" attributes to Mairobert.

"I reflect with astonishment," he writes at this date, "on the strange fate which pursues me. If the king had lived in health for eight days longer, I should have regained my civil rights, of which I have been deprived by injustice. I had his royal word for it, and the unjust aversion with which he had been inspired toward me would have changed to benevolence, and even to predilection." The new king, caring much less than Louis XV. for the reputation of Madame du Barry, might be expected to attach less importance to Beaumarchais' services. However, the manufactory of libels established in London was not in want of work. Louis XVI. and his young wife had hardly ascended the throne, amid the applause of all France—which was happy at seeing there was at last an end to the scandals of the preceding reign—when a dark tissue of lies and calumnies were already being prepared against them, and, above all, against the queen. These anonymous insults, which the conflict of opinions under free governments renders at once more rare and more dangerous, become affairs of state under a *régime* of silence. Discussion being absent, it is naturally replaced by defamation, and the existence of the governing powers is worn out in combining little plans for removing little obstacles, which reappear and become multiplied incessantly. The commission that Beaumarchais had fulfilled under Louis XV. suggested the idea of employing him again in operations of the same nature. In passing from the direction of the police to the ministry of marine, M. de Sartines had maintained friendly relations with him; he himself, in the sad position for which he was indebted to the Maupeou Parliament, felt it necessary not to let himself be forgotten by the new government. There was, moreover, an attraction for him here which did not exist in the preceding mission. To labor for Louis XV. and Madame du Barry had been an affair of necessity; to serve the interests of a king who was young, true-hearted, and honorable, to prevent calumny from tarnishing with its impure breath the respect due to a young, beautiful, and virtuous queen, was an enterprise which might well inspire Beaumarchais with a praiseworthy and sincere zeal. Accordingly, on this occasion he did not wait to be asked; he advanced and offered his services. "All the king wishes to

know alone and promptly," he writes to M. de Sartines, "all he wishes to do quickly and secretly himself—here I am: I have at his service a head, a heart, arms, and no tongue. Before the present time I never wished for a patron: this one pleases me; he is young, he means well. Europe honors him, and the French adore him. Let each one in his sphere aid this young prince to deserve the admiration of the entire world, of which he has already the esteem."

As Beaumarchais' zeal could not, on account of his sentence, be made use of officially, it was still in the capacity of secret agent that Louis XVI.'s government sent him to London in June, 1774. It was again necessary to stop the publication of a libel which was considered dangerous. This one was called "Notice to the Spanish Branch on its right to the Throne of France in default of Heirs." Under the appearance of a political dissertation, the pamphlet was specially directed against the queen Marie-Antoinette; its author was not known: it was only known that its publication was intrusted to an Italian Jew, named William Angelucci, who in London bore the name of William Hatkinson, who used a number of precautions to preserve his incognito, and who had at his disposition enough money to get two large editions of his libel printed at the same time, one for London, the other for Amsterdam.

On accepting this second mission, which was to be so fertile in adventures, Beaumarchais, whether he thought it necessary to increase somewhat the importance of his part, or considered this proof of confidence was necessary to its success, had asked for an order written in the king's own hand. The king, on his side, fearing doubtless that the negotiator might make too free a use of his name, had refused it; Beaumarchais went off, nevertheless; but he was tenacious, skillful, and little accustomed to give up what he wished for; and it is rather curious to observe how, in a series of letters to M. de Sartines, he came back to the charge incessantly, in a thousand different ways, until he at last obtained what had been in the first instance refused. "He can do nothing without this order written in the king's hand. Lord Rochford, formerly the English ambassador at Madrid, with whom he is intimate, and who

might serve him usefully as minister at London, will not put himself forward if he is not certain that a personal service has to be rendered to the king. How can it be feared that he will compromise the king's name? This sacred name," he says, "will be looked upon by me as the Israelites regarded the supreme name of Jehovah, the syllables of which they dared not pronounce except in cases of supreme necessity. . . . The presence of the king, it is said, is worth fifty thousand men to the army: who knows how much his name may spare me in guineas?" After having developed his argument in the most varied manner, Beaumarchais, seeing that it does not succeed, undertakes to prove to M. de Sartines that unless he obtains what he desires his mission fails, and that if it fails M. de Sartines himself is lost:

"If the work sees the day," he writes, "the queen, justly indignant, will soon know that it might have been suppressed, and that you and myself had undertaken to suppress it. I am as yet nothing, and can not fall from very high; but you! Do you know any woman who forgives an insult? 'They could stop,' she would say, 'the work which calumniated the late king and his mistress; by what odious predilection have they allowed this one to circulate?' Will she examine whether the intrigue which affects her is not better combined than the other, and whether precautions have not been better taken by those who have watched? She will only see you and me. For want of knowing whom to attack, she will let all her anger fall upon us; and its least effect will be, to insinuate to the king that you are nothing but an unskillful minister, of few resources, and scarcely fitted for great things. As for me, I shall perhaps be looked upon as a man who has been bought over by the adversary, whoever he may be; they will not even do me the favor to think that I am only a fool, they will think I am a rogue. Then let us be prepared, you to see credit weakened, fall and perish, and I to become what it may please the fate which pursues me."

In the same letter Beaumarchais indicates a somewhat ingenious process for the use of negotiators of all kinds who might happen to blush:

"I have seen Lord Rochford," he writes, "and found him as friendly as ever; but when I explained this affair to him, he remained as cold as ice. I tried him in every way; I appealed to his friendship; claimed his confidence; excited his *amour propre*, by giving him to hope that he would be making himself agreeable to our king; but I

could tell by the nature of his answers that he looked upon my commission as a police affair and one of espionage, in a word, as an underhand proceeding; and as the idea which he had formed suddenly filled my heart with humiliation and mortification, I blushed like a man who had degraded himself by a vile commission. I must add that, feeling myself blush, I stooped as if my buckle had hurt my foot, so that, on rising, my redness could pass for the natural effect of a rush of blood to the head in consequence of the position I had taken. This lord is not very cunning; in any case he will not serve me, and I run the greatest risk of not succeeding. I have already explained the fatal consequences of such a thing. This may be the speck of a storm, which will burst in all its violence over your head and mine. You must do impossibilities to induce the king to send me an order or commission, bearing his signature in terms similar to those which I gave in my second extract, and which I will copy at the end of this letter; the task is as delicate as it is now essential for you. So many beggars and scamps have come to London in reference to the last libel, that every thing which appears connected with the same object can only be looked upon here with great contempt. This is the basis of your argument with the king, but give him the details of my visit to the lord. It is certain that this minister—although my friend—can not be decently required to confide in me for the advantage of my master, if this master makes no difference between the delicate and secret mission with which he honors an honest man, and the order which he issues to a police-officer, who undertakes one of his ordinary inquiries."

In this long dispatch to M. de Sartines, of which we quote only a small portion, the reader, not to speak of the extreme freedom of Beaumarchais' relations with the minister, will see with what clever persistence he brings every thing back to his fixed idea, that of obtaining a written order in the hand of the king. There is, doubtless, some exaggeration in his reasoning; he is a man who wishes his services to be valued, and increases, as much as he can, both the importance of a libel, the danger of displeasing an irritated queen, and the fragile tenure of a minister. There is also something true in this argument, as applicable to governments in which personal questions absorb all others. M. de Sartines no doubt thought, at last, that his ministerial prospects were bound up with Beaumarchais' wishes, for he made the young king copy the form of an order which his correspondent, with wonderful *aplomb*, had composed himself, and which was in the following terms:

"M. de Beaumarchais, intrusted with my secret orders, will leave for his destination as soon as he possibly can; the discretion and promptness he may display in their execution will be the most agreeable proof he can give me of his zeal for my service. LOUIS.

"Marly, July 10, 1774."

I have not found, in the papers which were intrusted to me, the text of this order, written in the king's hand; but it is seen from the letter which follows the one just given that Beaumarchais at last received it:

"The order of my master," he writes to M. de Sartines, "is still in its virginity; that is to say, it has been seen by no one; but if it has not yet served me in connection with other persons, it has nevertheless been of wonderful assistance to myself in increasing my strength and doubling my courage."

In another dispatch Beaumarchais addresses the king himself in the following terms:

"A lover carries round his neck the portrait of his mistress; a miser fastens his keys there; a devotee his reliquary; as for myself, I have had a gold box made, large, oval, and flat, in the form of a lens, in which I have inclosed your majesty's order, suspending it by a little gold chain to my neck, as the thing which is most necessary for my labors and most precious to myself."

Once decorated with his gold box round his neck, the negotiator went to work, entered into relations with the Jew Angelucci, and endeavored to persuade him to destroy a libel, for the publication of which the secret enemies of the queen had offered him every thing. He succeeded by a great outlay of eloquence, but also, as usual, by a great outlay of money. For 1400 pounds sterling (about 35,000 francs) the Jew abandoned his speculation. The two contracting parties went afterward to Amsterdam to destroy the Dutch edition also. Beaumarchais made Angelucci agree in writing to the fairest conditions in the world, and, free from all care, gave himself up to the pleasure of visiting Amsterdam in the capacity of a tourist. All at once he heard that the astute child of Israel, of whom he had thought himself sure, had started suddenly and secretly for Nuremberg, taking away with him the money he had given him, and a volume which had escaped his observation, and which was about to be reprinted. Beaumarchais

became furious, and prepared to follow him. His letters at this period of his negotiation exhibit a feverish impatience.

"I am like a lion," he writes to M. de Sartines; "I have no more money, but I have diamonds and jewels; I am going to sell every thing, and, with rage in my heart, I must recommence traveling like a postillion. I do not understand German, the roads I am to take are unknown to me, but I have procured a good map, and I already see that I must go to Nimeguen, to Cleves, to Dusseldorf, to Cologne, to Frankfort, to Mayence, and finally to Nuremberg. I shall travel day and night if I do not drop from fatigue on the road. Woe to the abominable man who forces me to go three or four hundred leagues farther, when I thought I was about to repose. If I find him on the road, I shall strip him of his papers and kill him, for the pain and trouble he has caused me."

Such was the state of mind in which Beaumarchais pursued the Jew Angelucci through Germany. He met with him at last near Nuremberg, at the entrance to the forest of Neustadt, trotting along on a little horse, and little suspecting that any thing disagreeable was galloping behind him. At the sound of the post-chaise Angelucci turned round, and recognizing the man he had deceived, rushed into the wood. Beaumarchais jumped from his post-chaise and pursued him, pistol in hand. Before long the Jew's horse, impeded by the trees, which became thicker and thicker, was forced to stop. Beaumarchais seized his man by the boot, threw him off his horse, turned his pockets out, and emptied his valise, at the bottom of which he found the copy which had escaped his vigilance. In the mean while Angelucci's supplications somewhat softened the ferocious temper we have just seen him exhibit; he not only did not kill him, but even left him a portion of the bank-notes which he had given him. After this operation, he came back through the forest to regain his carriage, when an incident occurred which is already known from a letter published in his works. Just after he had quitted Angelucci, he found himself attacked by two brigands, one of whom, armed with a long knife, asked him for his money or his life. He snapped his pistol at him, but the priming did not take: after being knocked down from behind, he received a blow from a knife, which was aimed full at his breast, and which happily came against the famous gold box containing Louis XVI.'s note;

the point slid along the metal, scarred the breast, and went into Beaumarchais' chin. He rose by a desperate effort, tore the knife from the robber—wounding himself in the hand with the blade—knocked him down in his turn, and was about to throttle him; but the second assassin, who had at first run away, returned with his companions, and the scene was about to become fatal to Louis XVI.'s secret agent, when the arrival of his servant and the sound of the postillion's horn put the robbers to flight.*

All this narrative is so romantic, that we should hesitate about believing it if the papers relating to this affair did not contain a *procès-verbal*, drawn up by the burgomaster of Nuremberg, at the command of Maria-Theresa, after another incident not less extraordinary, which we shall presently relate. In this *procès-verbal*, dated September 7, 1774, the citizen Conrad Gruber, keeping the inn of the Red Cock at Nuremberg, sets forth how M. de Ronac, that is to say, Beaumarchais, arrived at his house, wounded in the face and hand, on the evening of the 14th of August, after the scene in the wood; and he adds a detail which quite confirms the feverish state which we thought we could perceive in Beaumarchais' own letters. He declares that M. de Ronac had been very restless, that he had risen very early in the morning, and had run all over the house, so that, to judge from all his conduct, his mind appeared to be wandering a little.

Such a complication of incidents might well have produced on Beaumarchais' brain the excitement which this worthy Conrad Gruber mistook for mental alienation; but the traveler was not yet at the end of his adventures, and the last one was to surpass all the others in the extraordinary nature of its incidents.

Fearing that, after his departure from Nuremberg, the Jew Angelucci would go there with some other copy of the libel, and thinking it would be more advantageous to get him arrested and conducted to France, Beaumarchais determined to reach

* In the letter written from Germany to be shown to his friends, and which was published during his lifetime, Beaumarchais only relates the scene of the two robbers; he does not say a word in reference to his secret mission to the Jew Angelucci.

Vienna, to solicit an audience from Maria-Theresa, and to beg the empress to grant an order for the man's extradition. As the sufferings occasioned by his wounds rendered a land journey too painful, he reached the Danube, hired a boat, embarked, and arrived at Vienna. Here we will let him speak for himself; the details which follow, and which have remained completely unknown until now, are so curious, and narrated with so much vividness, that the extract will perhaps not appear too long. We borrow it from a voluminous and unpublished document addressed by Beaumarchais to Louis XVI., after his return to France, and bearing the date of the 15th of October, 1774:

"My first thought at Vienna," writes Beaumarchais, "was to prepare a letter for the empress. Fearing that the letter might not be seen by her alone, I abstained from explaining my motive in soliciting an audience. I endeavored simply to excite her curiosity. As I could obtain no access to her, I went to the Baron de Neny, her secretary, who, on my refusing to tell him what I wanted, took me apparently for some Irish officer or some wounded adventurer, who wished to extort a few ducats from her majesty's pity. He received me as badly as possible; refused to take charge of my letter unless I told him my secret, and would, in short, have shown me the door; but assuming in my turn a tone as haughty as his, I assured him that I held him responsible toward the empress for all the evil his refusal might do to this most important transaction, unless he instantly undertook to convey my letter to his sovereign. More astonished at my tone than he had been at my appearance, he took my letter reluctantly, and told me I must not hope from that that the empress would consent to see me. 'That, sir, need not distress you; if the empress refuses me an audience, you and myself will have done our duty; the rest is a matter of fortune.'

"The next day the empress admitted me to an interview with the Count de Seilern, President of the Council at Vienna, who, on my simply setting forth that I was intrusted with a mission from the King of France, which I wished to explain personally to the empress, proposed to conduct me immediately to Schœnbrunn, where her majesty was. I went there, although my journey of the previous evening had much increased my sufferings.

"I first showed the empress your majesty's order, sire, the writing of which, as she told me, she at once recognized; adding, that I could speak freely before the Count de Seilern, from whom her

majesty assured me she had no secrets, and by whose counsels she had always profited.

"'Madame,' I said to her, 'it is less a question of a state interest, properly so called, than of the efforts which dark intriguers are making in France to destroy the happiness of the queen by disturbing the king's peace of mind.' I then gave her the particulars which have just been read.* At each incident, joining her hands in surprise, the empress repeated, 'But, sir, where did you acquire so ardent a zeal for the interests of my son-in-law, and, above all, of my daughter?' 'Madame, I was one of the most unfortunate men in France toward the close of the last reign. The queen, in those dreadful times, did not disdain to show some sympathy for all the horrors which were accumulating upon me. In serving her now, without even a hope that she will ever know of it, I am only acquitting an immense debt; the greater the difficulty of my enterprise, the more eager I am for its success. The queen deigned one day to say aloud that I showed too much courage and *esprit* in my defense to have committed the wrongs which were imputed to me. What would she say now, madame, if, in an affair which equally interests her and the king, she were to see me fail in that courage and in that behavior which she calls "*esprit*?" She would conclude from it that I have been wanting in zeal. "This man," she would say, "managed in eight days to destroy a libel which slandered the late king and his mistress, when the ministers of England and France had been making vain efforts, during eighteen months, to prevent its appearance. At the present time, intrusted with a like mission, he fails to succeed in it; either he is a traitor or he is a fool, and in either case is equally unworthy of the confidence which has been placed in him." Such, madame, are the high motives which have made me brave every danger, despise every suffering, and surmount every obstacle.'

"'But, sir, what necessity was there for you to change your name?"

"'Madame, I am, unfortunately, only too well known under my own throughout the whole of literary Europe, and my printed defense in my last affair has so excited every mind in my favor, that wherever I appear under the name of Beaumarchais, whether I excite an interest which proceeds from friendship or from compassion, or only from curiosity, I am visited, invited, surrounded, and am no longer free to work so secretly as so delicate a commission as mine requires; that is why I have begged the king to allow me to travel under the name of Ronac, in which my passport is made out.'

"The empress appeared to have the greatest curiosity to read the work whose destruction had caused me so much trouble. She read

* That is to say, the account of all his operations, of which we have given an abstract, until his arrival at Vienna.

it immediately after our explanation. Her majesty had the kindness to enter with me into the minutest details upon the subject. She was also kind enough to listen to me a long time. I remained more than three hours and a half with her, and begged her several times, with the most earnest entreaties, not to lose a moment in sending to Nuremberg. 'But would this man have dared to show himself there, knowing that you were there yourself?' said the empress. 'Madame, by way of giving him a fresh inducement to go there, I deceived him by telling him that I was about to retrace my steps and to return immediately to France. Besides, he either is or is not there. In the former case, by having him taken back to France, your majesty will render an essential service to the king and queen; in the latter, there will, at most, be only a step lost, in addition to one which I beg your majesty to have executed secretly by searching for some time in all the printing-offices of Nuremberg, so as to make sure that this infamous work is not being reprinted there, for, with the precautions I have taken elsewhere, I can answer for England and Holland.'

"The empress carried her kindness so far as to thank me for the ardent and thoughtful zeal which I exhibited. She begged me to leave her the pamphlet until the next day, giving me her sacred word that she would send it back to me by M. de Seilern. 'Go to bed,' she said to me, with infinite grace, 'and get bled without delay.* It ought never to be forgotten, either here or in France, how much zeal you have shown on this occasion for the interests of your master and mistress.'

"I only enter, sire, into all these details in order to make their contrast with the conduct which was soon to be adopted toward me more strongly felt. I returned to Vienna, my head still heated by this conference. I cast upon paper a multitude of reflections which appeared to me to have much importance relatively to the object in question. Count de Seilern undertook to show them to her. In the mean while, my book was not returned me, and the same day, at nine in the evening, I saw eight grenadiers with fixed bayonets, and two officers with drawn swords, enter my room, with an imperial secretary, bearing a message from Count de Seilern, in which he invited me to allow myself to be arrested, reserving to himself, he said, 'to explain to me, orally, his reasons for this conduct, which I should certainly approve.' 'No resistance,' said the bearer of the orders.

"'Sir,' replied I, calmly, 'I offer resistance sometimes to thieves, but never to emperors.'

"Seals were placed on all my papers; I asked permission to write

* These words of the empress, "Get bled without delay," might well be the result of a similar impression to that of the inn-keeper, Conrad Gruber.

to the empress, which was refused me. All my property was taken from me—my knife, my scissors, even my buckles, and this numerous guard was left in my room, where it remained thirty-one days, or 44,640 minutes; for, while the hours pass so rapidly to the happy that they can scarcely perceive that they succeed one another, the unhappy mince the hours of grief into minutes and seconds, each of which, taken separately, appears very long to them.* During the whole of this time, one of the grenadiers, with his bayonet fixed, kept his eyes upon me, whether I was awake or asleep.

"Judge of my surprise, my anger! To think of my health during this frightful period was impossible. The person who had arrested me came to see me the following day to tranquilize me. 'Sir,' I said to him, 'there is no rest for me until I have written to the empress. What happens to me is inconceivable. Let me have pens and paper, or prepare to chain me up before long, for this is enough to drive me mad.'

"At last I was allowed to write; M. de Sartines has all my letters, which were sent to him; let them be read; it will be seen what was the nature of the grief which was destroying me. Nothing of a personal nature affected me; all my despair arose from the horrible sin which was being committed at Vienna against the interests of your majesty by keeping me a prisoner there. 'Let me be fettered in my carriage,' I said, 'and taken back to France. I do not listen to the dictates of pride when duty becomes so pressing. Either I am M. de Beaumarchais, or I am a scoundrel who is assuming his name and his mission. In either case, it is against all good diplomacy to make me lose a month at Vienna. If I am a knave, by sending me back to France my punishment will be only hastened; but if I am Beaumarchais, about which it is impossible there can be any doubt after what has taken place, if people had been paid to injure the interests of the king my master, they could not do any thing worse than arrest me at Vienna at a time when I could be of use elsewhere.' No answer. I was left eight entire days in this killing distress. At last an imperial councilor was sent to interrogate me. 'I protest, sir,' I said to him, 'against the violence which is done to me here, to the contempt of all justice; I come to invoke maternal solicitude, and find myself overwhelmed beneath the weight of imperial authority.' He proposed I should write what I wanted, offering to be the bearer of it. I showed in my letter the injury which had been done to the interests of the king by keeping me with my arms crossed at Vienna. I wrote to M. de Sartines; I begged him at least to send off a courier by diligence. I renewed my prayers on the subject of Nuremberg. No answer. They left me a prisoner

* A souvenir of watchmaking very well adapted to the situation.

an entire month without deigning to set my mind at rest on any subject. Then, collecting all my philosophy, and yielding to the fatality of so disastrous a star, I devoted myself at length to taking care of my health. I had myself bled, drugged, and purged. They had treated me like a suspicious character in arresting me; like a lunatic in taking away my razors, knives, scissors, &c.; like a fool in refusing me pen and ink; and it was in the midst of all these evils, disquietude, and annoyance that I waited for M. de Sartines' letter.

"On giving it me, the thirty-first day of my detention, they said to me, 'You are free, sir, to remain or to go away, according to your desire or your health.' 'If I should die on the road,' I replied, 'I would not remain a quarter of an hour longer at Vienna.' I was presented with a thousand ducats on the part of the empress. I refused them with pride, but with firmness. 'You have no other money to start with,' they said to me; 'all your property is in France.' 'I will give my bill, then, in return for what I can not avoid borrowing for my journey.' 'Sir, an empress does not lend money.' 'And I accept no favors except from my master; and he is sufficiently noble to reward me if I have served him well; but I will receive nothing; I will, above all, receive no money from a foreign power by which I have been so odiously treated.' 'Sir, the empress will consider you are taking a great liberty with her in venturing to refuse.' 'Sir, the only liberty which a man who is very respectful, but who has been cruelly insulted, can not be prevented from taking, is that of refusing a favor. For the rest, the king my master will decide whether I have been wrong in pursuing this conduct; but, until his decision, I can not and will not adopt any other.'

"The same evening I started from Vienna, and, traveling day and night without rest, I arrived at Paris the ninth day of my journey, hoping that some light would there be thrown on so incredible an adventure as that of my imprisonment at Vienna. The only thing M. de Sartines said to me on the subject was, that the empress had taken me for an adventurer; but I had shown her an order in the handwriting of your majesty; I had entered into details which, in my opinion, could have left her no doubt respecting me. In consideration of this, I venture to hope, sire, that your majesty will not disapprove of my persistence in refusing the money of the empress, and will permit me to send it back to her. I might have looked upon it as a sort of flattering compensation for the error which had been made with respect to me if I had received a kind message from the empress, or her portrait, or any similar mark of honor, with which I could have met the reproach which is made to me every where of having been arrested at Vienna as a suspicious character; but money, sire! it is the climax of humiliation for me; and I do not think

that I deserved it for the reward of the activity, zeal, and courage with which I fulfilled my most hazardous commission to the best of my ability.

"I await your majesty's orders.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Thus was verified, at the expense of Beaumarchais, the justness of Talleyrand's maxim, "Above all, gentlemen, no zeal." By putting himself to the most outrageous trouble for a trifle, he got a month's imprisonment, and when he complained to M. de Sartines, the latter replied to him, "What can be done? the empress took you for an adventurer." There is, it appears to me, much candor in the conduct of the negotiator who can not be made to understand that the gold box hanging from his neck, his royal letter, his feverish ardor, his undue consumption of post-horses, his change of name, his attempted assassination, and his robbers—all on account of a worthless pamphlet—formed a sufficiently heterogeneous combination to inspire Maria-Theresa with some distrust, and that what in his own opinion should have rendered him interesting only served to make him suspected of madness or knavery. It appears, however, that, to console him for the thousand ducats, which went so much to his heart, a diamond was sent to him in exchange, with an authorization to wear it from the empress.

One word now on the payment of expenses in this "important affair." Beaumarchais, whose principal object at the time was to induce the king to facilitate his rehabilitation before the Parliament, gave his services gratis; but post-horses cost a great deal of money, and since the month of March, reckoning the journeys relating to the affair of Morande, the expenses of which were not yet paid, he had traveled 1800 leagues, going and returning, in the king's service. The total of the expenses, including the purchase of the Angelucci libel, and the cost of living in different towns, mounted up to 2783 guineas—that is to say, more than 72,000 francs; so that, if we also reckon the 100,000 francs given to Morande, 172,000 francs were spent, and the activity of an intelligent man was employed during six months, and all this to procure the destruction of two rhapsodies, which were not worth seventy-two

deniers. Singular means of stopping the production of libels, and singular employment of the public wealth!

In the mean while, by displaying much activity in matters of little importance, Beaumarchais gained ground. He was in continued correspondence with M. de Sartines, to whom he transmitted, with a mixture of good sense and jovial familiarity, his observations and views on all the political incidents of the day; he went and came without ceasing from Paris to London, in order to look after the libels, and already followed with as much attention the quarrel of the English colonies of America with the mother country. He was soon had recourse to in another affair of a still more extraordinary kind than the two former ones. Hitherto we have only seen him occupied in tracing out, pursuing, and purchasing the silence of vulgar libelers; the French government was about to bring him into conflict with a person as celebrated as himself, as keen, almost as witty, and whose life was not less extraordinary.

CHAPTER XV.

The Chevalier d'Eon.—Mademoiselle d'Eon at St. Petersburg.—M. d'Eon at London.—The Chevalier and the Queen of England.—The Chevalier's little Account.—The Chevalier and Beaumarchais.—The Chevalier and Gudin.—The Chevalier and M. de Sartines.

THE success of mystification is no rare thing in the annals of mankind; but, of all the mystifications in history, one of the most strange and most ridiculous is, beyond contradiction, that which was connected with the Chevalier d'Eon, who, until the age of forty-three, was looked upon every where as a man, who, in his capacity of man, became successively an advocate in the Parliament of Paris, censor of belles-lettres, diplomatic agent, Chevalier of Saint Louis, captain of dragoons, secretary of legation, and who finally filled for several months the functions of minister plenipotentiary from the court of France at London. After a violent and scandalous quarrel with the ambassador, Count de Guerchy, whose post he occupied temporarily, he was dismissed, and officially recalled by

Louis XV., but secretly maintained by him at London, with a pension of 12,000 livres. Soon afterward, toward 1771, doubts, springing from an unknown source, engendered in an unknown manner, were raised about the sex of this captain of dragoons, and, in the English style, enormous bets were made to depend on the question. The Chevalier d'Eon, who might easily have settled all doubts about the matter, allowed them to increase and be spread abroad. The betting fever grew twice as strong, and the opinion that the chevalier was a woman was not long becoming general. A short time afterward, in 1775, Beaumarchais, to whom he had declared that he was a woman, was sent to order him, in the name of the king, Louis XVI., to make his declaration public, and to assume the habit of his sex. He signed the required declaration, and, after hesitating a little longer as to the change of costume, resigned himself to it at last, and at fifty years of age quitted his dragoon's uniform for a petticoat and a *coiffe*, and in 1777 appeared at Versailles in this attire, which he wore until his death. A book was written with his co-operation, under the title of "Military, Political, and Private Life of Mademoiselle d'Eon," a splendid romance, in which it is told how his parents baptized him as a boy, although he was a girl, in order to preserve an estate which his family was to lose in default of male heirs. The chevalier, on his side, wrote and published numerous papers, in which he appeared as a female knight, and congratulated himself on having been able, in the midst of the tumults of camps, sieges, and battles, "to preserve," in his own words, "that flower of purity intact, pledge so precious and so fragile, alas! of our morals and our faith." He was compared to Minerva and Joan of Arc; Dorat addressed complimentary epistles to this old heroine, the glory of her sex. Writers of the greatest weight, and who might be considered the best informed, were taken in like all the others; and the grave author of the "History of French Diplomacy," M. de Flissan, published the following passage on the subject of the chevalier:

"It can not be denied," said M. de Flissan, "that she (the Chevalier d'Eon) presented a species of phenomenon. Nature was deceived in giving her a sex so much in contradiction with her haughty

and decided character. *Her mania for playing the part of a man, and for deceiving all observers, rendered her sometimes ill-tempered, and she treated M. de Guerchy with an impertinence which was inexcusable toward the king's minister. For the rest, she deserved esteem and respect for the constancy with which she concealed her sex from so much piercing scrutiny. The brilliant part which this woman played in missions of a delicate nature, and in the midst of so many adverse circumstances, proves in particular that she was more fitted for politics by her wit and information than many men who have run the same career.*"*

M. de Flassan wrote the lines we have quoted in 1809, a year before the death of the Chevalier d'Eon. A year afterward, 1810, the Chevalier d'Eon died at London, and on the body being examined, it was shown and established in the most authentic manner that this pretended *chevalière*, whom the historian of "French Diplomacy" reproaches with having a "mania for playing the part of a man, and deceiving all observers," that this pretended *chevalière* was a perfectly formed chevalier.†

What is the meaning of this grotesque mystification, and how is its success to be explained? What motive could induce a man of distinguished rank, a man of wit, an intrepid officer, a secretary of legation, a Chevalier of Saint Louis, to make himself pass for a woman during more than thirty years? Was the part forced upon him? If it was forced upon him, how and why could a government require a captain of dragoons, forty-seven years of age, to adopt so ridiculous a disguise? and how could this dragoon of forty-seven years of age, who shaved every morning like all dragoons,‡ who, in

* "Histoire générale et raisonnée de la diplomatie Française," vol. v., p. 454, first edition, 1809.

† This clearly results from the following certificate: "I certify by the present that I have examined and dissected the body of the Chevalier D'Eon, in presence of Mr. Adair, of Mr. Wilson, and Father Elysée; and that I found the male organs of generation perfectly formed in every respect. May 23, 1810. Thos. Copeland, surgeon." To this testimony are adjoined the signatures of a large number of well-known persons, who place the sex of the Chevalier d'Eon beyond all doubt.

‡ Although D'Eon had but little beard, it is certain that he had some; the shade of the beard can be recognized in a portrait executed in *paste*, which I have seen of him, and which he gave to Beaumarchais. It is true that his face possesses a certain smoothness, which, joined to his

Beaumarchais' own words, "drank, smoked, and swore like a German postillion," deceive so many persons, beginning with Beaumarchais himself? For the latter, as will be seen, always believed very sincerely that the dragoon was a woman, and in love with him, Beaumarchais! How, in fine, and why, did this masquerade problem become a sort of question of state, give rise to a host of negotiations, make kings and ministers act, speak, and write, make couriers travel, and cause, as is always the case, a great deal of money to be spent? These different questions, which prove how far Montaigne was right when he said, "The greater part of our vocations are farcical," these different questions are far from being made clear.

The most accredited version of the Chevalier d'Eon's story is the following: Having in his youth the appearance of a woman, he had been sent by Louis XV. in feminine disguise to the court of St. Petersburg. He had got introduced to the Empress Elizabeth in the capacity of *lectrice*, and had contributed to the establishment of good feeling between the two courts. Hence would have resulted some doubts as to his sex. These doubts, after disappearing in the midst of an entirely masculine career, had been revived and propagated a long time afterward by Louis XV. himself, after the scandal occasioned by the quarrel between D'Eon and the Count de Guerchy. Not wishing to be harsh to an agent whom he had employed with advantage in his secret service, and wishing, on the other hand, to give satisfaction to the De Guerchy family, to prevent a duel between the ambassador's young son, who had sworn to avenge his father, and D'Eon, who was a redoubted duelist; wishing, in fine, to put a stop to all the consequences of this quarrel, the king had been led, by the recollection of D'Eon's disguise during his youth, to order him to allow the rumor of his being a woman to gain ground. Louis XVI., adopting the politics of his predecessor, forced him to declare himself a woman and to assume a woman's clothes. "This strange personage," says Madame Campan, "had long been soliciting to be allowed to return to France; but it was necessarily feminine voice, must have contributed to give credibility to the fable of which he was the subject.

essary to find some means of sparing to the family he had offended the kind of insult which it would discover in his return; he was made to take the costume of a sex to which every thing is pardoned in France."

Such is the story most generally admitted on the subject of the Chevalier d'Eon; but it appears quite inconceivable. How indeed can we account for the fact of a king wishing to stifle the effects of a quarrel, and being unable to find any means more simple than that of changing one of the adversaries into a woman; and for that of an officer of forty-seven years of age choosing to renounce all manly careers, and wear petticoats during the rest of his life, rather than simply undertake to decline a challenge by order of the king—or rather than remain in disgrace and exile while preserving his liberty and his sex? How, in fine, can we account for the fact that if the Chevalier d'Eon is only the resigned victim of the wishes of Louis XV., and afterward adopted by Louis XVI., that when these two kings were dead, when the French monarchy itself had ceased to exist, when D'Eon, in retirement at London, had no longer any interest either of money or position in continuing the disguise imposed upon him, how can we account for the fact that he persisted in preserving it until his death?

All this is very singular and scarcely comprehensible. A new theory was produced some twenty years since about the Chevalier d'Eon. The views on which it is founded are also most strange, and we even experience some hesitation in reproducing them; however, as they are developed in a work of two volumes, which are declared to be taken from authentic documents,* we are obliged to say a few words on the subject. The author of this work affirms that if the famous Chevalier d'Eon consented to pass for a woman, it was not for the sake of the Guerchy family, but to save the honor of the Queen of England, Sophia Charlotte, wife of George III. He pretends that D'Eon having been surprised by the king, a

* This work is entitled "Memoirs of the Chevalier d'Eon," published for the first time from papers furnished by his family, and other authentic documents deposited in the Archives des Affaires Etrangères, by M. Gaillardet, author of the "Tour de Nesle."

physician who was a friend of the queen's and of D'Eon had declared to the king that D'Eon was a woman. George III. had asked Louis XV. about the matter, who, for the sake of his royal cousin's peace of mind, had hastened to assure him that D'Eon was a woman. From this day D'Eon was compelled to change his sex, with the consolation of having given a king to England; for the author of the book in question does not hesitate to tell us that he is convinced this pretended woman was the father of George IV.

This revelation on the subject of a queen who had hitherto always passed for a very virtuous woman, in order to be admissible, ought to be supported by conclusive proofs, which we look for in vain in the work entitled "*Memoirs of the Chevalier D'Eon.*" With the exception of a letter from the Duke d'Aiguillon to the chevalier, which, if authentic, might give some force to the hypothesis of the author, although it does not positively point out the queen, Sophia Charlotte; all that the book says, at least as regards the principal question, may be reduced to very daring assertions and very arbitrary inductions, accompanied by tales, pictures, and dialogues from imagination, which give the work the character of a novel, and deprive it of all authority.* We have no intention here of

* If we wished to discuss M. Gaillardet's hypothesis, objections to it would not be wanting. How, for instance, can we account for the fact that D'Eon, determined to save the Queen of England's honor by giving out that he was a woman, encouraged by his silence the bets which were made as to his sex, and allowed them to go on increasing during four years, from 1771, the date of the scene related by the author of the "*Memoirs,*" until 1775, when D'Eon signed the declaration dictated to him by Beaumarchais? How can we account for the fact that, during these four years, King George III., who, in the hypothesis in question, would have the greatest interest in throwing light upon the matter, did not employ any of those means for doing so which even a constitutional monarch could easily find in such a case? In fine, if this hypothesis can be made to explain D'Eon's persistence in retaining his woman's clothes until his death, it renders quite inexplicable the fact that the queen made no attempt to prevent the discovery after the chevalier's decease. This discovery, according to M. Gaillardet, occasioned the king's third and last attack of insanity. Nothing, however, would have been more easy than to avoid this misfortune, for D'Eon died in a state approaching indigence; and since, according to the supposition of Gaillardet, he was sufficiently devoted to the queen to sac-

offering any theory of our own about the Chevalier d'Eon. As this singular personage only figures in an accessory manner in Beaumarchais' life, it will be sufficient to take the situation at the moment when their relations began.

We are in May, 1775, the Chevalier d'Eon is in London, where he has been in disgrace and exile since his quarrel with Count de Guerchy, although he has continued, nevertheless, even after Louis XV.'s death, to draw the secret pension of 12,000 francs which that king granted him in 1776. The doubts raised about his sex appear to date from 1771. The English bets on the subject had been going on since that time, and D'Eon, by his silence, kept up the uncertainty of the betters. In any case, it was not the question of his sex which interested the French government at this epoch; it was another and a graver question. As secret agent of Louis XV., D'Eon had, during many years, a mysterious correspondence with the king and the few persons charged with the direction of his secret diplomacy, which, as is known, he had organized without the knowledge of his ministers. D'Eon exaggerated as much as possible the importance of these papers, which related to the peace concluded between France and England in 1763. He circulated among his acquaintances that if they were printed they would rekindle the war between the two nations, and that the English opposition had offered him enormous sums to publish them; he was, he said, too good a Frenchman to consent to it; but, in the mean while, he was in want of money, a great deal of money, because he had a great many debts, and if the cabinet of Versailles wished to regain possession of the papers, it must pay the debts of the present possessor. It was not, moreover, a present D'Eon asked for; the French government was his debtor. Indeed, it owed him more money than D'Eon owed himself. The chevalier sent, in 1774, to M. de Vergennes, Minister of Foreign Affairs, his life to her during thirty years, she might certainly, with very little money, have determined him to go and die in a distant land, instead of remaining exposed at London to the examination of the surgeons. There would be many more observations to make in reference to M. Gaillardet's hypothesis; the date of George IV.'s birth, taken in connection with the date of D'Eon's visit to England, does not at all accord with this hypothesis, which appears to us completely chimerical.

eign Affairs, a bill of the most amusing description, from which I only extract the following article, to give an idea of the intrepidity with which this dragoon charged the public treasury.

"In November, 1757," writes D'Eon, "the present King of Poland being Envoy Extraordinary of the Republic in Russia, sent to M. D'Eon, Secretary of the French Legation, a note, inclosing a diamond estimated at 6000 livres, in the hope that M. D'Eon would inform him of a very interesting affair which was then being conducted at St. Petersburg; the latter made it his duty to show the note and the diamond to the Marquis de l'Hôpital, ambassador, and to take back the said diamond to the Count de Poniatowski. M. de l'Hôpital, touched by the honorable action of M. D'Eon, wrote about it to the Cardinal de Bernis, who promised to procure him a grant of like value from the king for his fidelity; but, the Cardinal de Bernis having been displaced and exiled, M. D'Eon never received this grant, which he thinks he is entitled to claim 6000 livres."

Is not this a good story of a diamond, refused in 1757, and which is claimed as a debt in an account of 1774? Let us look at another item.

"The Count de Guerry," says D'Eon, prevented the King of England from making to M. D'Eon the present of a thousand gold pieces, which he grants to the ministers plenipotentiary residing at his court 24,000 livres."

Again:

"Not having been in a position, from 1763 to 1773, to attend to his vines in Burgundy, M. D'Eon has not only lost a thousand crowns income per annum, but also all his vines, and considers he may put this loss down at half its real amount. 15,000 livres."

"Moreover, M. D'Eon, without entering into an account which he might produce of the immense expenses occasioned by his residence in London from 1763 until the present year 1773, both for the maintenance and support of his late cousin and himself, and for the extraordinary outlays occasioned by circumstances, thinks he ought to confine himself to claiming the cost at London of a simple, decent establishment, in which a person limits himself to mere necessities and servants, which he consequently estimates at the moderate sum of 450 louis, or 10,000 livres tournois per annum, making for the said ten years 100,000 livres."

It is to be remarked that, since 1766, D'Eon had received an annual pension of 12,000 livres. The valet of Regnard's "Joueur" presents a list of claims which is certainly not equal

to the above. All the remainder is in the same style, and the total of the ingenious chevalier's claims is thus raised to the moderate sum of 318,477 livres 16 sous. D'Eon requested in addition that his pension of 12,000 francs might be converted into a deed of annuity for the same amount. Two negotiators had been sent to him successively, to obtain the return of these papers on less exorbitant conditions; one of them, M. de Pommereux, captain of grenadiers, and, as such, gifted with rare intrepidity, had gone so far as to propose to this captain of dragoons, who passed for a woman, to marry him. D'Eon, not wishing to give up any of his claims, had been determined to let the negotiation drop, when in May, 1775, the chevalier, learning that Beaumarchais was in London on other business, asked to see him. "We met," said D'Eon, "owing, no doubt, to a natural curiosity on the part of extraordinary animals to see one another." The chevalier solicited Beaumarchais' support; and, by way of giving him a proof of his confidence, confessed to him with tears that he was a woman, and what is strange is, that Beaumarchais did not doubt it for an instant. Delighted to oblige a girl so interesting from her warlike courage, her diplomatic talents, and her misfortunes, and to bring a difficult negotiation to an end, he addressed to Louis XVI. the most touching letters in favor of D'Eon. "When it is thought," he writes to the king, "that this creature, so much persecuted, is of a sex to which every thing is forgiven, the heart becomes moved with pity." "I venture to assure you," he writes elsewhere, "that, by treating this astonishing creature with skill and kindness, although soured by twelve years of misfortunes, she can easily be brought under subjection, and made to give back all the papers relating to the late king on reasonable terms." It will be asked how Beaumarchais, who certainly was not wanting in experience in these sort of matters, could imagine he saw a girl instead of a dragoon of the most masculine description. One thing is certain, that in all Beaumarchais' papers there is not a single line which does not prove that he was indeed completely deceived as to the sex of the chevalier; and if it could be supposed that in this comedy the author of "The Barber of Seville" was playing a part, and pretending to take a man for a woman, we

should be prevented from entertaining this idea by the candor with which his intimate friend Gudin, who accompanied him in the visit during which the negotiation with D'Eon was effected, relates, in his unpublished memoirs concerning Beaumarchais, the misfortunes of this interesting woman. "It was at the house of Wilkes,* at dinner, that I met D'Eon for the first time. Struck by the cross of Saint Louis, I asked Miss Wilkes who this chevalier was; 'he has,' I said, 'a woman's voice, and from that, apparently, have arisen all the stories which have been told about him.' I knew no more about him at the time; I was still ignorant of his relations with Beaumarchais. I soon ascertained them for myself. She confessed to me with tears (it appears that this was D'Eon's style) that she was a woman, and showed me her legs, which were covered with scars from wounds she had received when, after being thrown from her horse, which had been killed under her, a squadron passed over her body, and left her almost dead on the plain."

No one could have been mystified with more naïveté than Gudin. During the first period of the negotiation, D'Eon paid the most delicate attention to Beaumarchais: he called him his "guardian angel," he sent him his "complete works" in fourteen volumes, which he recommended to his indulgence, for this strange being, dragoon, woman, and diplomatist, was at the same time a scribbler of the most prolific kind. He characterizes himself very well in a letter to the Duke de Praslin.

"If you wish to know me, M. le Duc, I will tell you frankly that I am only good for thinking, imagining, questioning, reflecting, comparing, reading, writing, for traveling from the east to the west, from the south to the north, and for fighting on the plain or in the mountains. If I had lived in the time of Alexander or Don Quixote, I should have been Parmenio or Sancho Panza. If you put me to any thing else, I should, without committing any absurdity, consume all the revenue of France in a year, after which I would give you an excellent treatise on economy. If you wish for a proof, look at all I have written in my history of the finances on the distribution of the public wealth."

Under the effect of the pretended *chevalière's* cajolery, Beau-

* Wilkes was at this time Lord-mayor of London.

marchais returned to Versailles, pleaded her cause with warmth, exhausted himself in proving that the papers she had in her hands, and with which he was not acquainted, were of the greatest importance, asked permission to renew the negotiations which had been broken off with her, and obtained it in the following letter from M. de Vergennes, which is important as not being in accordance with the version generally adopted of the views entertained by the French government in regard to the Chevalier d'Eon. The following is M. de Vergennes' unpublished letter to Beaumarchais, of which I have only suppressed some insignificant passages :

"I have beneath my eyes, sir, the report you have made to M. de Sartines of your conversation respecting M. D'Eon ; it is of the greatest exactitude. I have, in consequence, taken the king's orders : his majesty authorizes you to agree to all reasonable security which M. D'Eon may demand for the regular payment of his pension of 12,000 livres, it being well understood that he is not to derive this annuity from any investment out of France ; the capital which would have to be employed for producing it is not in my power, and I should meet with the greatest obstacles in procuring it ; but it is easy to convert the said pension into a life annuity, to which he could hold the title.

"The question of the payment of debts will occasion more difficulty. M. D'Eon's claims are rather high on this point ; he must reduce them, and considerably, for us to make an arrangement. As you must not seem, sir, to have my mission concerning him, you will have the advantage of making him speak first, and, consequently, will have a superiority over him. M. D'Eon has a violent temper, but I think he has an honest heart, and I do him sufficient justice to be convinced that he is incapable of treachery.

"It is impossible M. D'Eon should take leave of the King of England ; *the revelation of his sex can no longer be permitted ; it would be ridiculous for both courts.* The testimonial he wishes to have substituted suggests some difficulties ; however, it can be granted provided he be contented with the praise which his zeal, his intelligence, and his fidelity deserve ; but we can not praise either his moderation or his subordination ; and in any case, there must be no question of the scenes he had with M. de Guerchy.

"You are enlightened and prudent ; you know what men are, and I am not uneasy about your arriving at a good result with M. D'Eon, if it is possible to do so. If the enterprise fails in your hands,* it

* That is to say, the enterprise, the object of which was to obtain the return of the secret correspondence of D'Eon with Louis XV.

must be taken for granted that it can never succeed, and we must make up our minds for whatever may be the result. The first sensation might be disagreeable for us, but the consequences would be frightful for M. D'Eon. A very humiliating part is that of an exile who bears the varnish of treason: contempt is his lot.

"I am very sensible, sir, of the praise you have kindly awarded to me in your letter to M. de Sartines. I aspire to deserve it, and receive it as a pledge of your esteem, which will be always flattering to me. Rely, I beg you, upon mine, and upon all the sentiments with which I have the honor to be your very humble and very obedient servant,

DE VERGENNES.

"Versailles, June 21, 1775."

This letter from M. de Vergennes, which did much honor to Beaumarchais, proves that at that time no one thought of making D'Eon assume a woman's dress; but it proves at the same time that his feminine dress was considered even then as an established fact. The only condition required for allowing his return to France was the return of his correspondence with Louis XV. It is not until two months afterward, in a letter to Beaumarchais, dated August 26, 1775, that M. de Vergennes explains himself on the subject of the woman's costume in the following terms:

"Whatever desire I may have to see, to know, and to hear M. D'Eon, I will not conceal from you, sir, one source of uneasiness by which I am besieged. His enemies are on the watch, and will not easily forgive all he has said of them. If he comes here, however well-behaved and circumspect he may be, they may attribute remarks to him contrary to the silence imposed upon him by the king; denials and justifications are always embarrassing and odious to honorable minds. *If M. D'Eon would disguise himself, all would be arranged; it is a proposition which he alone can make;* but, for the sake of his own tranquillity, he should avoid, at all events for some years, living in France, and necessarily in Paris. You may make what use you think fit of this observation."

The phrase we have just italicized in the minister's second letter seems to be in contradiction with the one we have italicized in the first. Did M. de Vergennes mean that D'Eon was a man, and that he was to dress himself up like a woman? If so, how are we to make this accord with what he wrote two months previously about the "revelation" of D'Eon's sex? Moreover, and without saying any thing about the

strangeness of a minister and a man of serious disposition bringing forward an idea of this kind as quite a simple thing, if M. de Vergennes' phrase had the meaning which it at first sight appears to have, this phrase, addressed to Beaumarchais, would render the letters of the latter completely unintelligible, for he is perpetually speaking of the Chevalier d'Eon's feminine sex. Let us add, finally, that this phrase, taken literally, would also destroy M. Gaillardet's theory, who, to explain Beaumarchais' error, pretends that D'Eon and the minister made an agreement that the agents commissioned to negotiate between them should be themselves misled as to the chevalier's true sex. These considerations led us to think that M. de Vergennes believed, like Beaumarchais, that D'Eon was a woman, that the word "*disguise*" was an improper expression which escaped the minister, who only meant to say, "Although M. D'Eon has always passed for a man, since he is at present recognized as a woman, he ought to dress like one." The form of the letter seems to indicate, also, that it was written to support the initiative taken by Beaumarchais with regard to the question of woman's attire. It was Beaumarchais, in fact, who insisted particularly on this point.

"All this," he writes to the minister in a letter dated October 7, 1775, "has given me an opportunity of knowing still better the creature with whom I have to deal, and I still keep to what I said to you before, that the feeling of resentment against the late ministers (those who had dismissed him in 1766) and their friends of the last thirty years is so strong *in him** that it would be impossible to place too insurmountable a barrier between the contending parties. Written promises of good behavior are not sufficient to stop a head which always becomes inflamed at the mere name of Guerchy; his positive avowal of his sex, and an engagement to appear for the remainder of his life in woman's clothes, are the only safeguards against scandal and misfortune. I have required this authoritatively, and have obtained it."

Here, for the rest, is another autograph letter from M. de Vergennes to Beaumarchais, of a later date than the two I have already quoted, having been written February 10, 1776, and in which the minister, while he first speaks of D'Eon,

* The word "*him*" proves nothing against Beaumarchais' error. It is only the result of his being accustomed to look upon D'Eon as a man.

through habit, as a man, seems to be thoroughly persuaded that the chevalier is a woman.

"Versailles, February 10, 1776.

"I must not let you remain ignorant, sir, that a very exact copy is being circulated in Paris of the "safe-conduct" which you had to give M. D'Eon in case he should return to France, and which could be of no use to him if he renounced returning to his country, or if he returned to it in the costume of his real sex. You can understand that this document causes great scandal among those who imagine there can be no reason for awarding praise to a person who had been in a certain way proscribed, and it is very difficult to enter into an explanation with all the tattlers and all the censors.

"What interest do you think your Amazon can have had in publishing a document which evidently ought not to have left her hands either by a copy or as an extract? I will not suppose that you neglected to impress this upon your Amazon. I am much afraid she is the dupe of some interested persons, who, by their advice, have wished to put her forward in order to give body to some new intrigue. It would be useless to attempt to impede her in what she pleases to do; but if she does not wish to return, as I presume to be the case, try, sir, if with dexterity you can not gain the original of a safe-conduct which can be of no advantage to her if she does not mean to make use of it, and which can not even serve her any longer, since she has promised not to re-enter the kingdom except in woman's clothes. Do not doubt the sincerity of the sentiments with which, sir, I am your very humble and very obedient servant,

"DE VERGENNES."*

Beaumarchais and M. de Vergennes appear to me, then, to have been equally deceived by D'Eon on the question of sex; but Beaumarchais got the better of him on the question of money. The chevalier, it is remembered, asked the trifle of 318,477 livres for returning the celebrated correspondence. Beaumarchais, while rejecting these absurd claims, mentions no figures himself; and in the transaction of the 5th October, 1775, by virtue of which D'Eon declares himself a woman, and engages to return all the papers of Louis XV., the agent

* Let us quote in support of our opinion another unpublished letter, addressed by M. de Vergennes to the chargé d'affaires at London, dated March 23, 1776: "I should be very pleased if M. de Beaumarchais could conclude with the *Amazon d'Eon*, not that I wish for her here, about which I care very little, but in order to be no longer obliged to pay attention to an adventure which does not amuse me nearly so much as the pit."

of M. de Vergennes binds himself to deliver to him a deed securing him 12,000 livres of annuity, in addition to *larger sums, of which the amount would be remitted to him*, for the payment of his debts in England. Each of the two contracting parties had a loop-hole to escape by. If the larger sums did not appear sufficiently large to the chevalier, he intended to keep a portion of the papers in order to obtain larger sums still; as Beaumarchais, on the other hand, did not intend to pay all the debts it might please D'Eon to declare, he had obtained from the king the power of "battling," to employ his expression, with Mademoiselle d'Eon from 100 up to 150,000 francs, reserving to himself the right of paying the money by installments, and increasing or diminishing the sum according to the confidence this cunning personage might inspire him with.

D'Eon commenced by exhibiting an iron chest, well padlocked, which was deposited with an English admiral, his friend Lord Ferrers, as security, he said, for a debt of £5000 sterling. He declared that this chest contained all the secret correspondence. Here was a difficulty for Beaumarchais; he was not authorized to look at these papers; but if he gave the money without doing so, he might, he says, receive in exchange nothing but washing-bills. After a fresh journey to Paris to obtain permission to make an inventory of the papers, he at last received the authorization, and on the chest being opened, it was found that Lord Ferrers, the real or pretended creditor, had only received, as security, papers of scarcely any importance. D'Eon confessed then, with blushes, that the most important papers had remained concealed beneath the floor of his bed-room. "She conducted me to her house," writes Beaumarchais, "and drew from beneath the flooring five card-board boxes, well sealed, and labeled 'secret papers, to be remitted to the king alone,' which she assured me contained the whole of the correspondence, and the entire mass of the papers which she had in her possession. I commenced by making an inventory, and marking them all, so that none of them might be taken away; but, to make more sure that the entire mass was there, I ran through them rapidly while she was writing the inventory."

It is seen that Beaumarchais was a man of precaution; then

only did he pay Lord Ferrers' claim, who remitted to him in exchange an equal sum in bills accepted by the Chevalier d'Eon, after which he prepared to start for Versailles with his chest. The chevalier naturally considered *the larger sums* not sufficiently large; but as the transaction of October 5 not only stipulated for the return of the papers, but also bound D'Eon to wear woman's clothes, and to remain silent concerning all his old disputes with the Guerchy family, Beaumarchais took a high hand with him:

"I assured this young lady," he writes to M. de Vergennes, "that if she was good, modest, silent, and behaved herself well, I would give a good account of her to the king's minister, even to his majesty himself, and that I hoped to obtain some still further advantages for her. I made this promise the more willingly from the fact that I had still about 41,000 livres of Tours in my hands, out of which I meant to reward each act of submission and good behavior, as if doing so through the special generosity of the king or yourself, M. le Comte, and only as gratuities, not as payments. It was by means of this secret proceeding that I still hoped to govern and rule this impetuous and cunning creature."

When he arrived at Versailles with his chest, Beaumarchais was complimented by M. de Vergennes, who sent him a magnificent certificate, declaring that his majesty had been much satisfied with the zeal he had shown in this matter, and the intelligence and skill with which he had accomplished the commission his majesty had intrusted to him. The negotiator was beginning to attract the attention of Louis XVI. The preceding missions had left him in the shade; this one was putting him in a prominent position. He was not a man to remain there, and to neglect his point. Before starting again for London, he addressed to Louis XVI. a series of questions, begging the king to be kind enough to answer them in the margin, and the king, with his own hand, replied obediently to Beaumarchais' questions. The autograph is interesting; the body of the document is written in Beaumarchais' hand, and signed by him; the answers to each question are traced in the margin, in a writing which is rather elegant, but unequal, weak, and irresolute, the t's and v's being scarcely indicated. It is the characteristic writing of the good, weak, unhappy sov-

ereign who was destined seventeen years afterward to be swallowed up by the Revolution ; and, in order that the secret agent might glory at his ease in having been in direct correspondence with Louis XVI., the answers of the monarch are followed by the annexed attestation, written and signed in the hand of M. de Vergennes : *All the answers to the questions are in the king's hand.*" In order to appreciate this document as a sign of the discordance of all things during this period of French history, it must not be forgotten that at the period at which it was prepared, Beaumarchais was suffering from the effect of a legal condemnation which declared him to have lost all rights of citizenship, and it is in this position that he commences in writing the following dialogue with Louis XVI. :

" Essential points which I beg M. le Comte de Vergennes to present for the king's decision before my departure for London, this 13th Dec., 1775 ; to be replied to in the margin :

" Does the king grant to Mademoiselle d'Eon permission to wear the cross of St. Louis on her woman's clothes ?

" *Answer of the king.* In the provinces only.

" Does his majesty approve of the gratuity of 2000 crowns which I have given to this young lady on her assuming woman's clothes ?

" *Answer of the king.* Yes.

" Does his majesty in this case leave her man's clothes at her entire disposition ?

" *Answer of the king.* She must sell them.

" As these favors are to be dependent upon a certain frame of mind into which I wish to bring Mademoiselle d'Eon forever, will his majesty leave me the power of granting or refusing, according as I may think useful for the good of his service ?

" *Answer of the king.* Yes.

" As the king can not refuse to give me, through his Minister of Foreign Affairs, an acknowledgment in good form of all the papers I have brought back to him from England, I have begged the Count de Vergennes to entreat his majesty to be kind enough to add at the bottom of this acknowledgment, *in his own hand*, a few words of satisfaction as to the manner in which I fulfilled my mission. This reward, the dearest to my heart, may also one day be of the greatest utility to me ; if some powerful enemy ever pretended to ask me for an account of my conduct in this affair, with one hand I would show the order of the king, with the other I would present my master's attestation that I have fulfilled his orders to his satisfaction. All the intermediate operations will then become a deep ditch, which each

one will fill up according to his pleasure, without being obliged to speak, or ever troubling myself about what may be said on the subject.

"Answer of the king. Good."

Here the subject of the dialogue changes. As long as it is only necessary to decide whether D'Eon is to wear the cross of St. Louis on his woman's clothes, and to sell his man's clothes, Louis XVI. gives very clear and very precise answers; but Beaumarchais wishes to lead him farther, and we shall see that in some months he will succeed. For the moment, he is too much pressed and too pressing. He passes without transition from the D'Eon affair to the American affair, and seeks to gain by assault the king's adhesion to plans with which he has been pursuing him for some time. Louis XVI. maintains reserve, and the tone of his answers changes. The meaning of what follows will be clearly explained when we come to treat of Beaumarchais' influence in the American question; but, as all this written dialogue is contained in the same letter, we have thought it desirable not to mutilate it, for fear of depriving it of its true aspect. We accordingly continue to quote it.

"As the first person I shall see in England will be my Lord Rochford, and as I have no doubt that this lord will ask me secretly what answer the King of France gives to the prayer the King of England addressed to him through me, what shall I reply to him on the part of the king?"

"Answer of the king. That you received none."

"If this lord, who has certainly preserved much of his intimacy with the King of England, wishes secretly to induce me to see this monarch, shall I consent or not? This question is not an idle one, and deserves to be well weighed before giving me my orders.

"Answer of the king. That may be."

"It having been the design of this minister to admit me into the secrets of a policy especially his own, if he wished now to connect me with other ministers, or if, in whatever manner it might happen, the opportunity should be offered to me, shall I accept or not?"

"Answer of the king. It is useless."

"In the case of the affirmative I can not do without a cipher. Will the Count de Vergennes give me one?"

"No answer."

"I have the honor to inform the king that the Count de Guines*

* The French ambassador at London.

has endeavored to render me an object of suspicion to the English ministers. Shall I be permitted to say a few words to him on the subject, or does his majesty wish that, while continuing to serve him, I should appear ignorant of all the dark means which have been employed for injuring me personally, my operations, and consequently the good of his service?

"Answer of the king. He (the ambassador) must remain in ignorance."

The king meant that M. de Guines was not to be informed of what Beaumarchais was doing in London in reference to the position of the insurgent colonies. What follows is the gravest part of the letter; and, accordingly, the king makes no reply to it.

"Finally, I request, before starting, a positive answer to my last note;* but if ever a question was important, it must be admitted that it is this one. I answer with my head, after mature reflection, for the most glorious success of this operation, during the entire reign of my master, without either his own person, that of his ministers, or his interests being ever in any way injured thereby. Will any one of those who dissuade his majesty from it dare to answer in his turn also with his head to the king for all the evil which must infallibly come to France from their causing it to be rejected? In case we should be sufficiently unfortunate for the king to refuse steadily to adopt so simple and wise a plan, I entreat his majesty, at least, to be permitted to take down the date, in his presence, of the period at which I offered him this admirable resource, so that he may one day render justice to the correctness of my views, when all that will remain will be to regret bitterly not having followed them.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

This singular dialogue between Louis XVI. and Beaumarchais seems to represent very well the prudent disposition of the one and the active disposition of the other. The temerity of the secret agent will soon finish by gaining the victory over the prudence of the king, and Beaumarchais, who has only put forward the trifling questions about D'Eon in order to reach the great ones about America, is obliged to start again for London, having only ascertained that D'Eon is to sell his man's clothes. He found the chevalier, who to him is always

* The object of this note, of which we shall speak again, was to determine the king to send secretly, through Beaumarchais, assistance in arms and ammunition to the American colonies.

a *chevalière*, somewhat unfaithful to the promises of modesty and silence which he had made in the transaction of the 5th October. Under the pretext of stopping the bets made about his sex, he called attention to himself in the English journals with that vain display which was habitual to him, and as his announcements were composed so as still to leave in mystery a point which should have been considered as settled, they were more fitted to tempt the bettors than to discourage them. Beaumarchais reproached him rather hastily; the chevalier, more hasty still than Beaumarchais, seeing, moreover, that his austere friend kept the king's purse-strings tightly drawn, became quite angry. Hence a rupture, and an interchange of letters, in which D'Eon, after offering Beaumarchais the most masculine insults, endeavored to take advantage of his fatuity by suddenly reassuming the tone of a young lady, and complaining amorously of the ingratitude of this perfidious man.

"I confess, sir," writes this dragoon in woman's clothes, "I confess that a woman may sometimes find herself in such unfortunate situations that circumstances may oblige her to profit by services of which she is the first to see the absurdity, because she penetrates the motive.* The greater the skill and delicacy of the man who wishes to oblige her, the greater the danger for her; but what souvenirs do these reflections recall to me! They recall to me that, by a blind confidence in you and your promise, I discovered to you the mystery of my sex; that through gratitude I gave you my portrait, and that through esteem you promised me yours.

"There have been many other engagements between us; all that you have advanced beyond that, as to our approaching marriage, according to what I hear from Paris, can only be regarded by me as

* The most striking thing in D'Eon's letters, written to Beaumarchais, of which I only quote some fragments, is, that while sustaining as well as possible before him this part of a woman, concealed under the appearance of a man, he often gives to his phrases an enigmatic turn, by which he would seem to have wished to establish clearly, for the period when his fraud would be discovered, that he was duping a man as cunning as the author of "The Barber of Seville;" and that he was duping him, and at the same time laughing in his face, without the latter perceiving it. Beaumarchais, on his side, was amusing himself at the expense of this *amorous old she-dragon*, and was becoming the more confirmed in his error in proportion to the skillful manner in which D'Eon simulated the anger of an offended old maid.

mere *persiflage* on your part. If you have made a serious matter of a simple pledge of friendship and gratitude, your conduct is pitiable. That would be a true piece of contempt, and a breach of faith, which a woman of Paris, however much she might be broken in to fashionable morals, could not pardon, still less a woman whose virtue is as uncivilized as mine, and whose disposition is so haughty when the good faith and sensibility of her heart are wounded. Why did I not remember that men are only on the earth to deceive the credulity of girls and women? . . . I only thought, too, that I was rendering justice to your merit, admiring your talents, your generosity. I loved you, doubtless, even then; but the situation was so new to me that I was very far from thinking love could arise in the midst of trouble and grief."

Beaumarchais replied to D'Eon in the grave tone of a man who has a duty to fulfill, and means to remain insensible to the reproaches and insinuations of an angry old maid; and as he suspects less than ever that he is being mystified, he writes to M. de Vergennes:

"Every one tells me that this mad woman is mad about me. She thinks I have treated her with contempt, and women never pardon such an offense. I am far from despising her; but who the devil would ever have imagined that, to serve the king properly in this affair, it would have been necessary for me to become the gallant knight of a captain of dragoons? This adventure appears to me so absurd, that I have all the trouble in the world to regain my seriousness so as to finish this note properly."

It is certain that if M. de Vergennes had been in the secret of the chevalier's true sex, which we do not think he was, he must have had a good laugh in his turn, but at the expense of Beaumarchais. In any case, as D'Eon was not reasonable and modest according to the terms of the agreement, and did not assume woman's clothes and return to France, Beaumarchais gave him no more money. D'Eon wrote the most violent and abusive things against him to M. de Vergennes. This "guardian angel" of the first period of the correspondence is only a "conceited fool;" he has "the insolence of a watchmaker's apprentice who has by accident discovered perpetual movement:" he can only be compared to "*Olivier Lédain, barber, not of Seville, but of Louis XI.*"

Beaumarchais received these broadsides of insult with the calm of a perfect gentleman. "She is a woman," he replied

to M. de Vergennes, "and in such a frightful situation that I pardon her with all my heart. She is a woman; this explains every thing." D'Eon, finding that he was considered to have been sufficiently remunerated, pretended to have further papers to publish. Beaumarchais was at first somewhat alarmed about it, but was soon reassured. It was only a boast of the chevalier's; he had nothing more: he had given things for 120,000 livres,* for which he had at first wanted 318,000; and Beaumarchais kept him in a certain state of awe, for he retains in his hands the bills bearing his acceptance to Lord Ferrers, and as D'Eon's pension had been converted into a deed of annuity, he could, if necessary, have it seized, provided this pretended young lady persisted in not executing the terms of the treaty. For the rest, knowing the vain disposition of the individual, he recommended M. de Vergennes, if he wished to secure his return to France, to appear not to think of it. Afraid of being forgotten, the chevalier arrived at Versailles of his own accord one fine morning in August, 1777; but he no longer remembered that he had to dress as a woman: he was ordered to assume that costume; he obeyed, and for some time excited much curiosity and interest; when this curiosity had fallen off, he started back to London, and as he had no further connection with Beaumarchais, we have nothing more to do with him.

In taking leave of the strange affair of the Chevalier d'Eon, we shall be tempted to conclude like Voltaire, who wrote the following lines in reference to the subject in 1777: "The whole of this adventure confounds me; I can conceive neither D'Eon, nor the ministry of his time, nor the actions of Louis XV., nor those of the present day; I understand nothing in this world." There is, indeed, something incomprehensible about a world in which such masquerades can be made important questions. We will, however, say, looking at the

* In paying the real or supposed claim of Lord Ferrers, Beaumarchais, who had been authorized to make the best terms he could in paying, had induced D'Eon to allow a discount to the king, which reduced the sum given to 109,000 livres. He had afterward remitted to D'Eon small sums, which made the total of the money given amount to £4902. Throughout this affair Beaumarchais appears more economical with the king's money than in the two preceding ones.

enigma as it existed under Louis XVI., what seems to us most probable, according to the documents beneath our eyes. Contrary to the most general opinion, it appears to us very probable that Louis XVI. and M. de Vergennes, in forcing D'Eon to wear woman's clothes, thought him really a woman. The serious disposition of the king and of the minister scarcely allows us to suppose that they could have thus lent themselves to so ridiculous and unbecoming a comedy, in which Beaumarchais alone played the part of dupe.* But as this pretended revelation furnished a sufficiently convenient means of stifling all the consequences of the former quarrels of the chevalier with the Guerchy family and their friends, they both hastened to adopt it as a settled thing, without caring much to verify its truth. As for D'Eon, it is evident that from the day when, I do not know by what cause, the doubts which the disguise of his youth had given rise to appeared again in his more mature age, he first of all repelled them, then encouraged them, and corroborated them the more successfully by appearing to let the secret of his being, as he pretended, a woman, be extorted from him with much trouble. Without attending to the completely romantic hypothesis of M. Gaillardet,† D'Eon appears to us to have been induced to play this comedy by two motives, not very lofty in themselves: first of all, the hope of obtaining from the French government more money as an interesting *amazon*; next, and above all, vanity, a want to get spoken of at any price, which is the most marked trait in his character. In an unpublished letter of his to a friend, we read the following lines: "I am a lamb

* Independently of the letters already quoted, several other letters of M. de Vergennes confirm me in this opinion. As for Beaumarchais, the mystification which D'Eon subjects him to is seen in all his correspondence.

† An antiquary of Tonnerre, D'Eon's native place, M. le Maistre, who is at present preparing a serious work on the chevalier with the same documents which were made use of by Gaillardet, writes to tell us that we were not wrong in mistrusting the pretended discovery of the latter in reference to D'Eon's relations with the Queen of England, and that all this story is a *pure romance*. As far as Beaumarchais is concerned, we could, for our part, easily point out numerous inaccuracies in M. Gaillardet's work.

whom Guerchy has driven mad by trying to *precipitate into the river of oblivion*." This phrase depicts D'Eon admirably. In an ordinary position he would have lived unperceived, above all, since his scandalous quarrel with the Count de Guerchy had shut him out from every official career.* Passing for a woman, or for a being apart, whose sex was a mystery, he was sure to attract general attention. This stratagem was successful, since it gained for him a celebrity which is not always attained by lofty natures and noble actions.† After his return to France, D'Eon circulated a report that Beaumarchais had retained for his own use a portion of the money destined for himself. The latter complained of it to M. de Vergennes, who replied to him in the following letter, which he authorized him to publish:

"Versailles, January 10, 1778.

"I have received, sir, your letter of the third of this month, and could only read with much surprise that you heard that Mademoiselle D'Eon accused you of having appropriated, to her prejudice, money which she supposed was destined for her. I can hardly think, sir, that this young lady could have made so calumnious an accusation; but, if she made it, you must not be at all uneasy and affected by it. You have the pledge and proof of your innocence in the account you rendered of your conduct in the most approved form, based upon authentic documents, and in the recognition of your services which I gave you with the knowledge of the king. Far from your disinterested conduct being open to suspicion, I do not forget, sir, that you have made no claim for your personal expenses, and that I never saw you exhibit any other design than that of facilitating Mademoiselle D'Eon's return to her country.

* It is known that in 1765, D'Eon, then Secretary of Legation at London, had gone so far as to accuse his ambassador publicly, before the English courts, of having attempted to poison and assassinate him.

† The same motive of vanity can explain his persistence, until death, in this disguise, after he had once adopted it. A distinguished man, who knew him in London during the latter period, has furnished me with another explanation. According to him, D'Eon, after having first of all found the female costume very inconvenient, had at last, however, accustomed himself to it, and wore it by inclination, always, however, mixing with it something of the masculine dress. The same person who kindly gave me this information assures me that, if in 1809 people in France still believed in D'Eon's being of the feminine sex, in England none of those persons who, at this period, associated with the chevalier doubted his being a man.

"I am very perfectly, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,
DE VERGENNES."

Beaumarchais, indeed, had not on this occasion even claimed his traveling expenses; indeed, he could afford to be generous toward the government, for the government was still more so toward him. He had at last reached his end. By continually rendering trifling services in trifling affairs, he had attained a sufficient hold on the confidence of Louis XVI., of M. de Maurepas, and of M. de Vergennes, to overcome scruples and hesitations as to their policy in the American question. Under the influence of his ardent solicitations, the government had decided to give their secret support to the insurgent colonies, and to intrust the important and delicate mission to him. On the 10th of June, 1776, Beaumarchais had obtained from the king a million francs, with which he set up and commenced that great American transaction, in which he will be seen to display a talent for organization and extension of views, a power of will, which the reader will be astonished, perhaps, to find in the author of "The Barber of Seville." In the mean while, it must also be remembered, in order to form a just opinion of the epoch, that at this same date of June 10th, 1776, when Beaumarchais was receiving from the government such a proof of confidence, and was becoming the agent and depositary of a state secret, the discovery of which might one day kindle war between France and England, he was still under the effect of the judgment passed upon him by the Maupeou Parliament. The person whom the government commissioned to carry succor to the Americans, and who was soon to make war on his own account against the English, was in a certain way civilly dead. These contradictory positions could not, however, continue; before fitting out his ships, the convict of the Maupeou Parliament had to set about regaining his rights of citizenship.

CHAPTER XVI.

Restitution of Civil Rights.—The Barber of Seville.—Final Victory over the Count de la Blache.

THOROUGHLY understanding his epoch, Beaumarchais had felt that the principal thing for him to do was not to insist on the justice of his cause, but, in the first instance, to make himself useful, and then necessary, after which his rehabilitation would accomplish itself. While he was wearing out post-horses in the service of the king, he had for the first time the satisfaction of hearing that the Maupeou Parliament, which had struck him so cruel a blow, had died in its turn of the wounds it had received from him.

Public opinion and the governing powers were now both on his side, and on the 6th of September, 1776, a solemn decree of the entire Parliament, Grand Chamber, and Tournelle assembled, annulled the judgment passed against Beaumarchais by the Maupeou Parliament, restored him to his civil rights and the functions he had previously occupied. This decree was received with the most lively enthusiasm by the mob who encumbered the court, and the happy suitor was borne in triumph, in the midst of applause, from the grand chamber to his carriage. He had prepared a discourse; he was prevailed upon to renounce his intention; but, as he was anxious to set himself right with public opinion, he published it the following day.

With "The Barber of Seville," Beaumarchais entered, as dramatic author, upon the path of great successes, and at the same time of great tribulations. His first comedy, before it could be produced on the stage, met with almost as many obstacles as the second, and underwent divers transformations, of which some account must be given.

Played for the first time in February, 1775, "The Barber" had been composed in 1772; it was at first a comic opera, in the style of the period, which the author destined for the *Italian* comedians, as they were called, who then possessed the

privilege of playing works of this kind. The complete failure of his second drama, “The Two Friends,” and the taste he always had for couplets, drove Beaumarchais from one extreme to the other, from the sentimental style to comic pieces with songs. The originality of “The Barber of Seville” in its first form consisted principally in the fact that the author of the words was at the same time the composer, or at least the arranger of the music. It will be remembered that in his letters from Madrid, while expressing a marked disdain for the Spanish Theatre in general, Beaumarchais entertained a very lively enthusiasm for the Spanish music, and, above all, for the interludes sung under the name of *tonadillas* or *saynètes*. The recollection of the *tonadillas* appears to have given rise to “The Barber of Seville.” It was first written in order to introduce some Spanish airs which the author had brought from Madrid, and was arranging in the French style. “I compose,” he writes at this epoch, “airs to my words and words to my airs.” Whether Beaumarchais’ Spanish airs did not seduce the ears of the actors of the Comédie Italienne, or whether they considered the work had too much resemblance to Sedaine’s opera, “On ne s’avise jamais de tout,” which was played on the same stage in 1761, it is quite certain that “The Barber of Seville,” as a comic opera, was refused point blank by the Italian actors in 1772. Gudin, in his unpublished Memoirs, attributes this refusal to the principal actor, Clairval, who had commenced life as a barber, and who, after representing Figaro in the shops of Paris, had an invincible antipathy for every part which reminded him of his original profession. Beaumarchais was obliged, then, to give up all idea of having his comic opera performed. I could only find some shreds of it among his papers, which lead me to think that it was no great loss, as the author’s poetic talent was very unequal, and rarely produced two good couplets in succession, while his musical talent did not rise above that of an amateur. It was reserved for two great masters, Mozart and Rossini, to add the charm of music to the inspirations of Beaumarchais. As for himself, after being rejected as a librettist and arranger of Spanish music, he determined to transform his opera into a comedy for the Théâtre Français.

Accepted by this theatre, after receiving the approbation of the censor Marin, "The Barber of Seville" was going to be played in February, 1773, when the quarrel of the author with the Duke de Chaulnes, which we have already narrated, took place. Beaumarchais was sent to For-l'Evêque, where he remained two months and a half, and the representation of his piece was necessarily adjourned. He was preparing to produce it a second time after leaving his prison, when the criminal accusation was instituted by Councilor Goëzman against him, and the "Barber of Seville" was adjourned again. Meanwhile, the immense success of the Memorials against Goëzman having made the suitor very popular, the French comedians wished to profit by that circumstance. They solicited permission to play "The Barber," and obtained it; the representation was announced for the 12th of February, 1774. "All the boxes," says Grimm, "were let up to the fifth representation." Just then, on Thursday, February the 10th, an order from high authority appeared to cover over the bills and stop the representation. That same day, February the 10th, Beaumarchais published the last and most brilliant of his judicial *factums*. As the report had been spread that his piece was full of allusions to his lawsuit, he added to the end of his last Memorial a note, in which, after announcing to the public that "The Barber of Seville" had been prohibited, he disclaimed all the allusions attributed to him, and terminated thus:

"I beg the court to be kind enough to order the manuscript of my piece, as it was deposited with the police more than a year since, and as it was going to be played, to be laid before it, subjecting myself to all the rigor of the law if in the composition or style of the work any thing be found having the smallest reference to the unhappy lawsuit which M. Goëzman has brought against me, or which is contrary to the profound respect I profess for the Parliament.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The fact is, that at this epoch the comedy of "The Barber," which had been composed before the Goëzman lawsuit, contained no allusion whatever to it. Although in its original form it was simply characterized by gayety, and had nothing of an absolutely satirical nature, it bore the punishment of

the reputation which was given to it beforehand, and Beaumarchais could not obtain permission to have it played. Soon afterward, the different missions of which we have spoken took him to England and Germany, and he had to throw his comedy on one side for a time. However, he did not forget it; the very obstacles which were opposed to him rendered him, as was always the case, more obstinate in surmounting them. On his return from Vienna in December, 1774, at the end of his month's captivity, which gave him some right to a sort of compensation, he was more urgent than ever in requesting permission to represent his piece. Circumstances were favorable: the Maupeou Parliament had ceased to exist for a month, Louis XV. was no more, the manuscript which Beaumarchais presented was very inoffensive; he at length obtained permission to have "The Barber" represented. But, between the permission and the representation, he acted as he thought fit: this comedy had been prohibited on account of pretended allusions which did not exist; he made up for this unjust prohibition by inserting in it precisely all the allusions which the authorities had been afraid of, and which were not in it. He strengthened it with a great number of satirical reflections, and a multitude of allusions more or less audacious. He also added much to its length, and increased it by an act.

It was in this form, overlaid, exaggerated, and confused, that "The Barber of Seville" was presented for the first time to the public, February 23, 1775. The noise made by the Memorials against Goëzman was still at its height. The obstacles which had stopped the production of his comedy for two years had redoubled the public curiosity. Beaumarchais already possessed the secret of attracting the multitude with incredible force; and at the first representation there was an influx of spectators which was only to be surpassed by that produced by "The Marriage of Figaro." "Never," says Grimm, speaking of "The Barber," "never did a first representation attract more people." "It was impossible," says La Harpe, in his turn, in the "Correspondence," it "was impossible to appear at a moment more marked by the popular favor, or to attract a greater concourse of persons."

The effect produced on this numerous audience was that of a very decided disappointment. People had expected a masterpiece: "It is always very difficult," writes La Harpe, at this time, "to answer a great expectation. The piece appeared rather farcical. The length of the speeches was found wearisome, the bad jokes disgusting, the bad morals disgusting." La Harpe's first impression, when compared with the one produced by reading the manuscript of "The Barber" as it was first represented, seems correct enough. Beaumarchais had counted too much on his popularity; he had made too free a use in every way of his *verve*, and encumbered his piece with useless scenes and jokes, which were frequently coarse, and destroyed all its charms, giving to it sometimes all the character of a burlesque. The failure was complete.

The next day Beaumarchais retouched the piece, and transformed a comedy which was full of faults into a masterpiece. It was as complete a success as it had been a failure. The audience recognized in it an original restoration of the old comedy of "Intrigue," freshened, extended, and revived, and the hisses of the previous evening changed into applause. "I went yesterday," writes Madame du Deffand, "to see Beaumarchais' comedy, which was being represented for the second time; the first time it was hissed, yesterday it had an extravagant success. It was exalted to the clouds, and applauded beyond all bounds."

During the first thirty representations of "The Barber of Seville," Beaumarchais lived on the best terms with the actors of the Comédie Française; there was one continued interchange of billets doux between them. But he soon thought he perceived that the actors were endeavoring to make his piece fail in order to confiscate it to their profit, in virtue of the law which gave to the actors the exclusive property of every piece the receipts of which once descended below a certain figure. To secure himself from any charge of cupidity, he took the cause of the authors in hand against this absurd law. For many years he fought the battle with the actors; but it was not till the Revolution came to his aid that he was able to conquer them, and to secure the recognition of the independence and rights of authors. He did succeed at last; and

the present society of dramatic authors owes to him its origin.

He was not, however, yet free from all the fetters of the past. The first civil action against the Count de la Blache was still going on. The judgment given against Beaumarchais had been annulled by a decree of the Grand Council, and the affair sent before the Parliament of Provence. The last decisive battle was fought at Aix, in July, 1778. In vain had the Count de la Blache surrounded himself by six advocates, and prepared his victory long beforehand; Beaumarchais' pen acted rapidly on the Provençal heads. At the expiration of a few days the public were gained over. "You have turned the whole town," said his solicitor to him. His triumph was complete, and a final judgment freed him forever from the Count de la Blache. The intoxicating effect of this triumph, after so many years of uncertainty and struggles, and the Provençal enthusiasm with which he was received, are described by an eye-witness in an unpublished letter written from Aix by Gudin, and which appears to us sufficiently interesting to be reproduced.

"D'Aix, July 23, 1778.

"Beaumarchais has at last gained his action at Aix. The case has been decided unanimously in his favor, with expenses and damages, *Le Falcoz* being upset in all his demands and claims as unfounded and *calumnious*; this word is in the judgment. The affair has been examined and discussed here with particular attention, and the questions of law have been treated with a clearness and depth which must do honor to the bar of the town. Le Falcoz exhibited prodigious activity and excessive skill; every day he went out at five o'clock in the morning, visited all his judges, went round to his six advocates, and showed himself every where. Beaumarchais did quite the contrary; he saw no one, he did not even go to his judges. I scolded him for it sometimes; but he replied to me like the Misanthrope, 'Ma cause n'est-elle pas bonne?' By way of replying to one of Falcoz's pleas, which set forth, with inconceivable impudence, that Beaumarchais had never been connected with M. Duverney, Beaumarchais let off at him the Memorial, which you must have received, 'Réponse ingénue,' &c. Le Falcoz, seconded by Châtillon and six advocates, having presented his petition to have the said Memorial burned by the hands of the executioner, and having published another Memorial, and another consultation, signed by the six, Beaumarchais replied to them in another document, which you are not yet

acquainted with, entitled 'Le Tartare à la légion.' He treats them therein like a genuine Tartar, except that he ridicules them with more liveliness than there ever was in the whole of Scythia. While he was thus amusing himself, and laughing with his counsel, numerous advocates of the town communicated to him and his advocate, and even printed, statements which proved that he had on his side both the authority of the law and all the commentators of laws. The judges maintained the most profound silence, and examined the affair with a severity calculated to confound all rash individuals. Our Tartar asked to be allowed to speak to his assembled judges, and to communicate with them all together; but as he claimed no advantage over his adversary, he asked the same favor for him. This was granted to them; and as they both speak well, the two sittings were very interesting. But the loftiness, the confidence, the frank manner of stating facts, and the good reasons which our Tartar exhibited, could not fail to influence the minds of all, which were in no way dazzled by the subtleness of his adversary, who was heard after him. Public opinion, which had been prejudiced during the last two years by the publication of Falcoz's consultation, and during the last two months by his visits, his speeches, his uniform, his title, and his allegations, had been suddenly taken from him by the vigorous replies of the Tartar. There now only remained to him a weak party, composed of persons who were obstinately attached to the nobility or to their own interests. The whole town, which lives upon lawsuits, was in a state of expectation and impatience. The judges were deliberating, the doors of the court were besieged; the women, and all who were curious or interested about the matter, were beneath the long avenue of trees not far from the court; the idlers filled the cafés, which are on each side of this promenade. Le Falcoz was in his drawing-room, which was well lighted up, and looks upon this avenue; our friend was in a very distant quarter. Night approached; at last the doors of the court were opened, these words were heard: 'Beaumarchais has won.' A thousand voices repeated them, clapping of hands spread all along the walk, the windows and doors of Le Falcoz were suddenly closed, the multitude, with shouts and acclamations, reached the residence of our friend; men, women, the persons with whom he was acquainted, and those with whom he was not acquainted, embraced, felicitated, and congratulated him. This universal joy, these shouts, these transports affected him, tears overtook him, and at last, like a great child, he fell into our arms and fainted away. There was a general contest as to who should succor him, who should give him vinegar, a smelling-bottle, and air; but, to use his own words, the sweet effects of joy do no harm; he soon recovered, and we went together to see and thank the first pres-

ident. This magistrate, with the noble severity of the head of an august tribunal, reproached him with the aggressiveness of his Memorials. He was right: as a man, one must approve of them; as a magistrate, it is impossible to do so conscientiously. In fact, they had appeared so lively to the Parliament that it had been unable to avoid condemning the second to be torn up, not by the hand of an executioner, as this Falcoz desired, but by that of an officer of the court, which is a very different thing. By way of teaching him to be so amusing another time, he was condemned, in addition to the destruction of his Memorial, to give a thousand crowns to the poor of the town, and he has given them two thousand by way of congratulating them, he said, 'on having such good and virtuous magistrates.' Falcoz's Memorials have also been suppressed. On returning from the house of the first president, we found the same crowd at the door; tambourines, flutes, and violins came in succession before and after supper. All the fagots of the quarter were heaped together and made into a bonfire. Persons of reading said, as they passed beneath the windows,

'Montrez Héraclius au peuple qui l'attend.'

"The ladies who were in his apartments wished to enjoy the sight, and obliged our friend to come to the window, and not to be modestly cruel toward people who had shown him so much good will. The workmen of the town have composed a song in honor of him, in Provençal *patois*, and sang it to him in a body beneath his windows. Every heart shared in his delight, and every one is enchanted with him and treats him as a celebrated man, to whose probity the justice which was his due has at length been paid."

CHAPTER XVII.

Beaumarchais and the War of Independence.—France and England in 1775.—Beaumarchais and Wilkes.—Memorial to the King.—The Opposition in England.—Beaumarchais to the King.—Beaumarchais supported by the Ministry.—The Ministry's first Grant.

AMONG all the French writers who have spoken of Beaumarchais in connection with one of the greatest events of modern times, the war of American independence, I only know of one who has had even a vague idea of the share taken by the author of "The Barber of Seville" in that event. All the others content themselves with saying that he sent ammunition

and arms secretly to the insurgent colonies. In the edition of Beaumarchais' works, published in 1809 by Gudin, almost all the documents relating to this portion of his life have been voluntarily suppressed. The heirs of the author of "The Barber of Seville" were then carrying on with the United States a lawsuit, which was not finally settled until 1835. In face of the arguments which were made use of for not paying the debt contracted with Beaumarchais, it would have been imprudent to publish these documents; by raising the position of the negotiator, and exhibiting him no longer as a mere speculator, but also as a promoter and agent of the French policy, there was at the same time a risk of their giving some appearance of justice to the ill-founded objections of the United States government. Beaumarchais' influence, then, in the transactions which brought about the American war, has remained almost unknown in France. On the other hand, various works have been published in the United States against Beaumarchais' claim, and consequently against himself, in which some facts are mixed up with a great many errors, and which prove that nations, like individuals, are not always distinguished by their gratitude. At present there is no harm in setting forth exactly, without exaggerating it, but at the same time without lessening it or changing its character, the part played by Beaumarchais in one of the most important acts of Louis XVI.

The writer whom I pointed out above as having had some vague idea as to what this part was is the Duke de Lévis, who in his "Souvenirs and Portraits," in treating of the rupture between England and France, in reference to the United States under the Maurepas ministry in 1778, wrote the following lines: "A wise ministry would have profited by the embarrassed position of the English to increase our fleet without endangering it, and Louis XVI., whose disposition was pacific, would easily have entered into these views. He would have waited with patience for the development of a large maritime force, capable of making his power respected in the two worlds. This prudent system was counteracted by the influence which Beaumarchais exercised on M. de Maurepas. *This man, more famous in literature than in politics, nevertheless had*

rather a large share in the war of independence." Hitherto, if we except the question of opinion, which we will examine presently, the facts set forth by M. de Lévis are correct; but what follows is a gross error, a strange confusion of dates and circumstances. This is what the Duke de Lévis adds: "Beaumarchais had purchased at the lowest price, in Holland, an immense quantity of guns, not less than sixty thousand, and had sold them on credit to the agents of the Americans. If they succumbed, his claim became lost with their liberty. The skillful author of '*Figaro*,' who had found access to M. de Maurepas, and who amused him by his sallies, succeeded in determining him to commence hostilities." It was scarcely worth while to have shown such correct information just before, in order to confound two things which have not the least connection: the policy of France in the American question, which lasted from 1775 to 1778, and the purchase of sixty thousand guns by Beaumarchais in Holland, fourteen years later, in 1792, and which were purchased, not for the United States, who had then no longer any need for them, but for France, and which consequently had nothing to do with the American affair. Under the Maurepas ministry, Beaumarchais had not to buy guns in Holland, for the excellent reason that he took them from the government arsenals. Accordingly, the inferences which M. de Lévis draws from the purchase of the guns fall to the ground with the fact itself.

The author of "*Souvenirs et Portraits*" is no less deceived when, in criticising M. de Maurepas' policy, which, according to him, was suggested by Beaumarchais, he says the following: "If M. de Maurepas had been more clever, he would have sent the Americans abundant and secret assistance, but he would never have come to a rupture, which the English themselves were anxious to avoid. In this manner he would have prolonged a ruinous war between the mother country and the colonies: while economizing the resources of France, he would have exhausted those of her eternal rival." We shall prove, on the contrary, that the system of secret, if not abundant assistance, which M. de Lévis reproaches the French ministry with not having practiced, was precisely the one which was adopted through the influence of Beaumarchais;

that this system was maintained as long as it could be, but that a period soon arrived when to continue it became impossible, and when it became necessary to choose between a war against England reconciled with America, or an alliance with America against England. From 1774 to 1778 the French policy on the question which occupies us went through three distinct phases, which succeeded one another as a matter of necessity: First, absolute neutrality, in expectation of events; secondly, secret support; thirdly, open alliance. We shall see Beaumarchais exhausting himself in efforts to drag our policy from the first to the second phase, which was to produce the third, and we shall see him succeed in it; but if he succeeded, it was not alone, as M. de Lévis said, because he amused M. de Maurepas in his old age by his sallies; he brought something else to the question besides sallies. M. de Maurepas, in spite of his influence, did not in himself constitute the whole government; the department of foreign affairs was at that time intrusted to a minister, M. de Vergennes, whom history, perhaps, does not appreciate at his full value, because he did not occupy himself in getting his praises celebrated, but who was none the less for that one of the most enlightened, wise, and firm ministers France ever had. M. de Vergennes was not a man to let himself be taken by sallies.

To consider another point: Louis XVI., the most upright of kings, was strongly averse to making use of the underhand schemes which are sanctioned in politics, even toward a rival power, which, to gain an advantageous end, did not always trouble itself about the morality of the means. For such a king and such a minister to determine on intrusting Beaumarchais with the dangerous and delicate operation of which we have to give an account, it was necessary, on the one hand, that the exigencies of the situation should be in accordance with his arguments, and, on the other hand, that both should have some confidence, not only in the wit, but in the capacity, sagacity, and prudence of the person who received such a mission from them.

What was the position of France in relation to England at the period when the quarrel between the American colonies and the mother country broke out? Its situation was deplor-

able; the disastrous seven years' war had benefited England alone. During these seven years' hostilities more than nine hundred thousand men had perished by land and sea, without reckoning the victims of the ravages and miseries which war brings in its train—and at the termination of this long struggle, no alteration was made in the limits of the Continental powers. England alone had gained at our expense in her colonies and commerce. By the fatal treaty of 1763, we had to give up to her Canada, the Isle of Cape Breton, the islands of Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica, and Tobago, besides Senegal; our Indian possessions were ruined, and, to complete the insult, England had forced us to raze the fortifications of Dunkirk, and to submit forever to the presence of an English commissioner, without whose authorization it was not permitted to move a single paving-stone on the quays or harbor of a French city. This last article of the treaty of 1763 had remained on the heart of France as a bitter insult; and it is pleasing to see, in an unpublished dispatch from M. de Vergennes to M. de Guines, a lively feeling of the shock inflicted on the national pride by this odious stipulation. We can perceive in it a noble desire to efface this shame, which was indeed effaced by the American war.

“You know,” writes the minister to his ambassador in July, 1775, “the jealous sensitiveness with which this article, so humiliating to France, is regarded, and the abuse to which the English ministers have only too often turned it for our mortification.” The tone of English diplomacy was indeed that of the conqueror's; it was harsh, readily arrogant, and bore the vindictive stamp of the policy of Lord Chatham.

It was impossible, in such a situation, for France and its government not to look with a certain interest upon the quarrel which had long been entered into between the colonies and England upon the question of taxation, as it gradually became more bitter, and assumed a graver and graver aspect. The rigorous measures adopted in 1774 by the English ministry against the town of Boston made America pass from opposition to contest; but it still seemed scarcely possible that the movement could not be repressed, and that inexperienced and unarmed militia would make head against the English troops.

If the opposition in England made use of this rebellion, and exaggerated its importance, in order to attack the ministry of Lord North, it did not itself believe the danger was serious. As for the ministerial party, it saw nothing in it but an insignificant disturbance. The French government thought then, first of all, like every one, that the quarrel would end by being promptly suppressed, and followed by some concessions. However, it was necessary for it to be well informed as to the progress and effect of events, and it could only acquire this information at London. The French ambassador at London was then the Count, afterward the Duke de Guines, a man of wit and pleasure, but of very ordinary capacity, whose information, derived as it was from the English ministers, and accepted without being verified, inspired but little confidence. Hence it was necessary for the French government to have recourse to every source of information, and to send various agents to London. Beaumarchais, as was his custom, put himself forward; he had given satisfaction by the skill with which he had treated the affair of D'Eon's papers, which had been standing over several years. This affair, not being yet completely terminated, presented a natural pretext for sending him to London, where he had the advantage of being intimate at the same time with the most opposite parties. It will be remembered that ten years previously, in the course of his residence in Spain, he had been the favorite of Lord Rochford, who was then ambassador at Madrid, and a great musical amateur: Beaumarchais used to sing duets with him, and had always kept up his intimacy with him as much as possible. Now in 1775, Lord Rochford happened to be minister of foreign affairs in Lord North's cabinet, and Lord Rochford was not a model of discretion, to judge by the following lines, which I extract from a dispatch, wherein M. de Vergennes characterizes the English minister with his prudent and calm manner: "If," he writes, "the idea we have formed of Lord Rochford is correct, it can not be difficult to make him say more than he intends." Beaumarchais, in fact, knew very easily how to make Lord Rochford speak out. It is true that this minister was replaced at the end of 1775, but he always remained a very influential man, living on terms of intimacy with George III., and consequently well worth listening to.

Beaumarchais was not less intimate with the democrat, or rather the demagogue Wilkes, a personage who was not very worthy of the influence he exercised for several years, but who at this time, as mayor of London, was moving and directing the masses at will. Wilkes had ardently embraced the cause of the colonies, which he made the subject of vigorous attacks against Lord North's cabinet. At his house Beaumarchais met all the Americans who came to England to take the part of the insurgents, or to observe the progress of affairs. At the epoch at which we have arrived (1775) the colonies had not yet completely broken with the mother country; but the first Congress that was held at Philadelphia, while repelling the notion of a separation, had nevertheless held it out in perspective as a threat, in case England should not do justice to the lawful complaints of the colonies. The ministry had replied to the Americans by sending troops and adopting rigorous measures. A royal proclamation declared them guilty of rebellion. A bill was brought in, by which it was ordered that they should be treated as enemies, and all their ships chased. These acts produced the most lively discussions. Wilkes called for the heads of ministers who were crushed beneath the weight of Lord Chatham's eloquence. The situation was critical in the highest degree, and nevertheless very few persons, either in England or France, thought that a separation was imminent. The ministerial orators insisted on the necessity of finishing with a handful of disaffected persons; the orators of the opposition called on the ministers for an account of the English blood which had been shed by English hands, and suggested plans of conciliation; but the possibility of a complete rupture was rejected by all. At this moment, in September, 1775, Beaumarchais addressed a long unpublished Memorial, of which I must reproduce the greater part. It will be remarked with what sagacity, nearly a year before the declaration of independence, at a period when the triumph of the Americans still appeared a chimera, he puts their triumph forward as a certainty, of which it is impossible to doubt, and the sure prospect of which should be used as a basis for the policy of France. The following is the Memorial:

TO THE KING.*

"Sire,—With the firm confidence I entertain that the extracts I address to your majesty are for you alone, and will not go out of your hands, I will continue, sire, to present to you the truth on all points known to me, which appear to me to be of value to your service, without regard to the interests of any one in the world.

"I withdrew from England under pretext of going to the country, and have come in all haste from London to Paris, in order to confer with Messieurs de Vergennes and Sartines on matters which are too important and too delicate to be intrusted to the fidelity of any courier.

"Sire, England is in such a crisis, such a state of disorder within and without, that it would be almost on the point of ruin if her neighbors and rivals were themselves in a state to occupy themselves seriously about her. I will set forth faithfully the position of the English in America; I received the particulars from an inhabitant of Philadelphia, who had lately arrived from the colonies, and had just been present at a conference with the English ministers, who were thrown into the greatest trouble, and struck with terror by his recital. The Americans, determined to suffer every thing rather than give way, and full of that enthusiasm for liberty which has so often rendered the little nation of Corsica redoubtable to the Genoese, have thirty-eight thousand effective men, armed and resolute, beneath the walls of Boston; they have reduced the English army to the necessity of dying of hunger in this town, or of seeking for winter quarters elsewhere, which it will do forthwith. About forty thousand men, well armed, and as determined as the former, defend the rest of the country, without these eighty thousand men having taken away a single laborer from the ground, a single workman from the manufactories. All those persons who were engaged in the fisheries, which the English have destroyed, have become soldiers, and feel that they have to avenge the ruin of their families and the liberty of their country; all those persons who took part in maritime commerce, which the English have brought to an end, have joined the fishermen to make war on their common persecutors; all the persons who worked in the harbors have increased the army of furious men, whose actions are all animated by a spirit of vengeance and hatred.

"I say, sire, that such a nation must be invincible, above all, when it has at its back as much country as it can possibly require for retreating, even if the English could make themselves masters of all their seaboard, which they are far from having done. All sensible persons, then, are convinced, in England, that the English colonies are lost to the mother country, and that is also my opinion.†

* Given to the king, sealed, by M. de Sartines, Sept. 21, 1775.

† The debates of the English Parliament at this date, in September,

"The open war which is taking place in America is less fatal to England than the intestine war which must yet break out in London; the bitterness between parties has been carried to the greatest excess since the proclamation of the King of England which declares the Americans to be rebels. This absurdity, this masterpiece of madness on the part of the government, has renewed the strength of all the men of the opposition, who have united against it. A resolution has been taken to come to an open collision with the court party during the first sittings of the Parliament. It is thought that these sittings will not pass without seven or eight members of the opposition being sent to the Tower of London, and that is just the appointed time for sounding the tocsin. Lord Rochford, who has been my friend for the last fifteen years, in conversing with me, said these words, with a sigh: '*I am much afraid, sir, that the winter will not pass without some heads being brought down, either among the king's party or the opposition.*' On the other side, the Lord-mayor Wilkes, in a moment of joy and liberty, at the end of a splendid dinner, said to me publicly the following words: 'The King of England has long done me the honor of hating me. For my part, I have always rendered him the justice of despising him. The time has come for deciding which of us has formed the best opinion of the other, and on which side the wind will cause heads to fall.'*

"Lord North, who is threatened with all this, would willingly give in his resignation if he could do so with honor and safety.

" . . . The least check which the royal army receives in America, by increasing the audacity of the people and the opposition, may decide the affair at London at a moment when it is least expected; and if the king finds himself forced to yield, I say it with a shudder, I do not think his crown more secure on his head than the heads of his ministers upon their shoulders. This unhappy English nation, with its frantic liberty, may inspire the man who reflects with true compassion. It has never tasted the sweetness of living peaceably under a good and virtuous king. They despise us, and treat us as slaves because we obey voluntarily; but if the reign of a weak or bad prince has sometimes caused a momentary evil to France, the licentious rage, which the English call liberty, has never left an instant of happiness and true repose to this indomitable nation. King

1775, prove, on the contrary, that the opinion which Beaumarchais brings forward as that of all sensible persons in England was then only shared by very few. He speaks thus in order to give more weight to his opinion, and thus takes away from this opinion a proof of sagacity which we must restore to it.

* This speech of Wilkes is the more insolent from the fact that it proceeds from a man who was wanting both in private and political morality.

and subjects are all equally unhappy.* Now, to increase the trouble still more, a secret subscription has been opened in London at the houses of two of the richest merchants of the capital, where all the disaffected send their gold to be forwarded to the Americans, or to pay for the assistance which is supplied to them by the Dutch. They do more: they have secret connections in Portugal, even in the king's council, on which they spend a great deal of money by way of trying to prevent the Portuguese from coming to any arrangement with the Spaniards.† They are in hope that this war will soon draw the English and French into the quarrel of the allies, and that this new incident will with more certainty produce the destruction of the present ministry, which is the constant object of all the opposition.

"Résumé: America escapes the English in spite of their efforts; war is kindled with more strength in London than at Boston. The end of this crisis will bring about war with the French if the opposition triumphs, whether Chatham or Rockingham replace Lord North. The opposition, to increase the trouble, intrigue in Portugal to prevent the settlement with Spain.

"Our ministry, which is badly informed, appears stagnant and passive over all these events, which affect us most nearly.

"It is indispensable to have a superior and vigilant man in London at present.

"The first thing which it is impossible to avoid doing is to urge the Spanish ministry to be less difficult with regard to its claims against Portugal. While the English ministry is endeavoring to bring Portugal to a reconciliation, and is informing the Portuguese that the internal troubles of England would absolutely prevent her at present from assisting them according to the terms of the last treaty, it is indispensable that we should take our steps with the Spanish ministry, in order to destroy, as much as possible, the effect of the intrigues and money of the English opposition, which is using its last efforts in Portugal in order seriously to produce a quarrel between the two powers of the South. . . .

" . . . Such, sire, are the motives of my secret journey to France. Whatever use your majesty may make of this paper, I rely enough on the virtue and kindness of my master to hope that he will

* Here are political opinions which one is not accustomed to attribute to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." It is true that Beaumarchais wrote this to a king of whom he was the agent; but, in general, an examination of his papers proves that, in application, his political ideas were but little in accordance with the effervescence of his wit.

† There was at this time a dispute between Portugal and Spain upon a boundary question.

not turn these proofs of my zeal against myself by intrusting them to any one, and thus increasing the number of my enemies, who will never stop me as long as I remain certain of the secrecy and protection of your majesty.

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

It is seen that in this Memorial Beaumarchais announces, with rare perspicacity, the approaching triumph of the American colonies, but it is also seen that he lays stress on the necessity of keeping away from every thing which might drag France into a conflict, the moment of which has not yet arrived. If Beaumarchais exaggerates the consequences of the struggle of parties in England, the fact is, that every one else was also deceived. It was naturally supposed that the checks experienced in America would render England furious with her ministers;* but the English people, with that sentiment of nationality, and that good sense which often characterize it in great crises, rendered these prognostications untrue. The defeat of the English troops weakened the opposition still more than the ministry: every thing was made subservient to the necessity of fighting with energy, and the general irritation, instead of being increased, became considerably allayed. It ought also to be observed that Beaumarchais' Memorial to the king is stated to have been first of all given to M. de Sartines, which authorizes us to suppose that Beaumarchais concealed this step from M. de Vergennes, or did not find this minister possessed the amount of confidence which was requisite. This, perhaps, will explain the following letter to M. de Vergennes, written the day after the Memorial:

"M. le Comte,—When zeal is indiscreet, it ought to be repressed; when it is welcome, it should be encouraged; but all the sagacity in the world would be unable to make a person, to whom no reply is given, imagine what conduct he is to pursue.

"I yesterday communicated to the king, through M. de Sartines, a short paper, which is only the résumé of what I stated to you at the long conference you granted to me the evening before: it gives

* We have read a dispatch of M. de Vergennes, written at about the same date as the memorial cited above, in which this minister appears, like Beaumarchais, swayed by the idea that a victory of the insurgents in America must cause a revolution to break out in London. M. de Vergennes goes so far as to express fears for the very person of the English king.

the exact state of men and things in England ; it concludes with the proposition I had made to you of putting a gag, during the time necessary for our warlike preparations, on every thing which, either by shouts or silence, could hasten or retard the proper moment. All this ought to have been discussed at the council, and this morning I hear nothing from you about it. The most fatal things to all affairs are uncertainty and loss of time.

"Must I wait for your answer, or am I to start without having one? Did I do well or ill in sounding minds whose dispositions are becoming so important to us? Shall I for the future take no advantage of confidential communications, and shall I repel instead of welcoming the overtures which must have an influence on the final determination? Finally, am I a useful agent to my country, or only a deaf and dumb traveler? . . . I shall wait for your answer to this letter, to start. I am, &c., BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Paris, September 22d, 1775."

He received, without doubt, the answer he desired, for the next day, before going to London, he wrote to M. de Vergennes :

"Paris, September 23, 1775.

"M. le Comte,—I start, well informed of the king's intentions and your own; let your excellency be at ease: it would be an unpardonable stupidity on my part, in such an affair, to compromise in any way the dignity of the sovereign and his minister; to do the best one can is nothing in politics; the first blunderer can offer as much; to do the best that circumstances admit of is what ought to distinguish from the common body of his servants him whom his majesty and yourself, M. le Comte, honor with your confidence on so delicate a point. I am, &c., BEAUMARCHAIS."

Dating from this moment, a direct correspondence was established between Beaumarchais and M. de Vergennes, and the argument which he pursues incessantly under various forms is the following: "The Americans will triumph, but they must be assisted in their struggle, for if they succumbed, they would join the English, and would turn round against us. We are not yet in a fit state for making war; we must prepare ourselves, keep up the struggle, and with that view send secret assistance in a prudent manner to the Americans." The following Memorial, addressed to Louis XVI. through the medium of M. de Vergennes, is the development of this idea, and, when compared with the first, shows us what progress the question had made:

PEACE OR WAR. .

TO THE KING ALONE.*

"Sire,—The famous quarrel between America and England, which will soon divide the world and change the system of Europe, imposes upon each power the necessity of examining well in what manner the event of this separation can influence it, and either serve it or injure it.

"But the most interested of all countries is certainly France, whose sugar islands have, since the last peace, been the constant object of the regrets and hopes of the English; regrets and hopes which must infallibly bring us war, unless by a weakness impossible to suppose we consent to sacrifice our rich possessions of the gulf to the chimera of a shameful peace, which would be more injurious even than the war which we dread. In a first Memorial, sent three months since to your majesty by M. de Vergennes, I endeavored to establish soundly that your majesty's character for justice could not be injured by taking wise precautions against enemies who are never delicate about those they take against us.

"At present, when a violent crisis is approaching with great rapidity, I am obliged to warn your majesty that the preservation of our possessions in America, and the peace which your majesty appears to desire so much, depend solely upon this one proposition: *the Americans must be assisted.* I will now demonstrate it.

"The King of England, the ministers of the Parliament, the opposition, the nation, the English people, all the parties, in fine, who are tearing this state asunder, agree that they ought no longer to hope to regain the Americans, and that not even the great efforts which are being now made to subject them can ever reduce them with success. Thence, sire, these violent debates between the ministry and the opposition, this flux and reflux of opinions admitted or rejected, which, as they do not advance matters, only serve to put the question in a plainer and a clearer light.

"Lord North, afraid of acting alone as pilot in the height of such a storm, has just profited by the ambition of Lord Germaine to lay all the weight of affairs on his ambitious head.

"Lord Germaine, confused by the clamor, and struck by the terrible arguments of the opposition, says now to Lords Shelburne and Rockingham, the leaders of the party: 'In the state in which things are, gentlemen, will you venture to answer to the nation for the Americans submitting to the Navigation Act, and returning under the yoke, *on the sole condition*, contained in the plan of Lord Shelburne, of being replaced in the position in which they stood before the troub-

* Given to M. de Vergennes, unclosed, February 29, 1776.

les of 1763? If so, gentlemen, take possession of the ministry, and make yourselves responsible with the safety of the state at your risks, perils, and fortunes.'

"The opposition, disposed to take the minister at his word, and quite ready to say yes, is only stopped by a doubt lest the Americans, encouraged by their successes, and perhaps emboldened by some secret treaties with Spain and France, may refuse now those very conditions of peace which they asked for with clasped hands two years since.

"On the other hand, M. L.* (M. de Vergennes will tell your majesty his name), a secret deputy from the colonies to London, quite discouraged by the inability of the efforts he has made, through me, with the French ministry, to obtain assistance in the shape of powder and munitions of war, says to me now, 'For the last time, is France absolutely decided to refuse to us all assistance, and to become the victim of England and the fable of Europe through this incredible apathy? Obligated to give a positive answer, I wait for reply in order to give my own. We offer France, in return for her assistance, a secret treaty of commerce, which will transfer to her, for a certain number of years after the peace, all the advantages by which we have, for more than a century, enriched England, besides guaranteeing her possessions according to the forces at our disposal. Do you not accept this? I only ask from Lord Shelburne the time a vessel would take to go and return, to inform the Congress of the propositions of England, and I can tell you at present what resolutions the Congress will take on the subject. They will immediately make a public proclamation, by which they will offer to all the nations in the world, in order to obtain their assistance, the conditions I now offer to you in secret. And in order to take vengeance on France, and force her publicly to make a declaration with respect to them, if we commit her beyond recall, they will send into your ports the first prizes they take from the English; then, on whatever side you may turn, this war, which you avoid and fear so much, becomes inevitable, for either you will receive our prizes in your ports, or you will send them back; if you receive them, the rupture with England is certain; if you send them back, instantly the Congress accepts peace on the conditions imposed by the mother country; the Americans, in indignation, unite all their forces to those of England to fall on your islands, and prove to you that the fine precautions you had taken for preserving your possessions were just those which were to deprive you of them forever.

* It was Arthur Lee, who afterward formed part, with Franklin, of the American deputation to Paris, and of whom we shall speak again directly.

“Go, sir, go to France, set before them this picture of affairs ; I will shut myself up in the country until your return, so as not to be forced to give an answer before receiving yours. Tell your ministers that I am ready to follow you there, if necessary, in order to confirm these declarations ; tell them *that I hear the Congress has sent two deputies to the court of Madrid with the same object, and I may add that they have received a very satisfactory answer.* Could the French council possess now the glorious prerogative of being the only one to be blinded as to the glory of the king and the interests of his kingdom.’

“Such, sire, is the terrible and striking picture of our position. Your majesty wishes sincerely for peace. The résumé of this Memorial will furnish you, sire, with the means of preserving it.

“Let us submit all possible hypotheses, and let us reason.

“What follows is very important.

“Either England will have the most complete success in America during the campaign ;

“Or the Americans will repel the English with loss.

“Either England will come to the determination already adopted by the king of abandoning the colonies to themselves, or parting from them in a friendly manner ;

“Or the opposition, in taking possession of the government, will answer for the submission of the colonies on condition of their being restored to the position they were in in 1763.

“Here are all the possibilities collected together. Is there a single one of them which does not instantly give you the war you wish to avoid ? Sire, in the name of God, deign to examine the matter with me.

“First, if England triumphs over America, she can only do so by an enormous expenditure of men and money. Now the only compensation the English propose to themselves for so many losses is to take possession on their return of the French islands, and thus make themselves the exclusive vendors of the valuable supply of sugar, which can alone repair all the injuries done to their commerce, and this capture would also render them forever the absolute possessors of the advantages derived from the contraband commerce carried on by the Continent with these islands.

“Then, sire, there would remain to you nothing but the option of commencing at a later period an unprofitable war, or of sacrificing to the most shameful of inactive peaces all your American colonies, and of losing 280 millions of capital, and more than 30 millions of revenue.

“2. If the Americans are victorious, they instantly become free, and the English, in despair at seeing their existence diminished by three quarters, will only be the more anxious, the more eager to seek

a compensation, which will have become indispensable, in the easy capture of our American possessions; and we may be certain that they will not fail to do so.

“3. If the English consider themselves forced to abandon the colonies to themselves without striking a blow, as it is the secret wish of the king they should do, the loss being the same for their existence, and their commerce being equally ruined, the result for us would be similar to the preceding one, except that the English, less weakened by this amicable surrender than by a bloody and ruinous campaign, would only derive from it more means and facilities for gaining possession of our islands, which they would then be unable to do without, if they wished to preserve their own, and to keep any footing in America.

“4. If the opposition takes possession of the government, and concludes a treaty of reunion with the colonies, the Americans, indignant with France, whose refusal will alone have caused them to submit to the mother country, threaten us from the present moment to unite all their forces with England in order to take possession of our islands. They will, indeed, only reunite with the mother country on this condition, and Heaven knows with what joy the ministry, composed of Lords Chatham, Shelburne, and Rockingham, whose dispositions toward us are publicly known, would adopt the resentment of the Americans, and carry on against you without cessation the most obstinate and cruel war.

“What, then, is to be done in this extremity, so as to have peace and preserve our islands?

“You will only preserve the peace you desire, sire, by preventing it at all price from being made between England and America, and in preventing one from completely triumphing over the other; and the only means of attaining this end is by giving assistance to the Americans, who will put their forces on an equality with those of England, but nothing beyond. And believe me, sire, that the economy of a few millions at present may, before long, cost a great deal of blood and money to France.

“Believe me above all, sire, that the necessary preparations for the first campaign will alone cost you more than all the assistance you are asked for now; and that the wretched economy of two or three millions will certainly make you lose, before two years, more than three hundred.

“If it be replied that we can not assist the Americans without wounding England, and without drawing upon us the storm which I wish to keep off, I reply in my turn that this danger will not be incurred if the plan I have so many times proposed be followed, that of secretly assisting the Americans without compromising ourselves;

imposing upon them, as a first condition, that they shall never send any prizes into our ports, and never commit any act which shall tend to divulge the secret of the assistance, which the first indiscretion on the part of Congress would cause it instantly to lose. And if your majesty has not at hand a more clever man to employ in the matter, I undertake and answer for the execution of the treaty, without any one being compromised, persuaded that my zeal will supply my want of talent better than the talent of another could replace my zeal.

"Your majesty can see, without trouble, that the whole success of this matter depends on secrecy and celerity; and one thing infinitely important to both would be to send Lord Stormont back, if possible, to London, as, through his extended connections in France, he is in a position to instruct, and does daily instruct England of all that is said and discussed in the council of your majesty.

"This is very extraordinary, but this is the case; the occasion of the recall of M. de Guines is as favorable as possible.

"England desires positively to have an ambassador; if your majesty were in no haste to name a successor to M. de Guines, and sent to England a chargé d'affaires or minister of acknowledged capacity,* Lord Stormont would be instantly recalled; and, whatever minister they might name in place of this ambassador, much time would elapse before he could be in a position, through his connections, to do us as much harm as we receive from Lord Stormont; and the crisis once passed, the most frivolous or the most magnificent of our nobles might be sent without risk as ambassador to London; after the plan had been carried out or had failed, all the rest would be without importance. Your majesty can judge by these papers whether my zeal is not as enlightened as it is ardent and pure; but if my august master, forgetting all the dangers which a word escaping from his mouth might cause to a good servant, who knows and serves but him alone, should allow it to appear that it is from me he receives this secret information, then even the exercise of all his authority would with difficulty preserve me from ruin, so much power have cabals and intrigues, sire, in the midst of your court to injure and upset the most important enterprises. Your majesty knows better than any one that secrecy is the soul of business; and that in politics, a plan discovered is only a plan lost. Since I have served you, sire, I have never asked you, nor ever will ask you, for any thing. Only, my sovereign master, provide that I be not hindered from working in your service, and all my existence is consecrated to you.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

* The advice of Beaumarchais was followed. After the recall of M. de Guines, a simple chargé d'affaires, M. Garnier, was in the first instance sent to England.

It is seen from the above that Beaumarchais considers the moment to have arrived for supporting strongly the plan of secret assistance, and that he sets forth this plan with a skill which would do honor to a professed diplomatist; it is seen also that he proposes himself, for the first time, as ready to put it into execution. The prudence of M. de Vergennes still led to a refusal. Beaumarchais wrote him a dozen letters of a more and more pressing character, which appeared to make a sufficiently lively impression on his mind. M. de Vergennes no longer believed so much in the possibility of preserving peace: "Although the tendency of France and Spain," he writes to our chargé d'affaires at London, April 20th, 1776, "is toward insuring the duration of peace, I confess to you that I am not at my ease when I consider the number of accidents, independent of the will of the sovereigns, which may confound their foresight." The disquietude of the French minister was soon increased by the distrustful and vexatious attitude of the English government; although France at the moment was still preserving the most absolute neutrality, that was not sufficient for the cabinet of London: it claimed to search our ships, to pursue the American vessels even beneath the guns of our forts, it interfered with our commerce, it maintained that we ought to punish those of our merchants who trafficked with the rebels. Beaumarchais carefully took advantage of these circumstances to support his idea. He narrated to M. de Vergennes, with much vivacity, a scene which he had had with Lord Rochford on this claim of the English government to have our merchants punished, and M. de Vergennes replied to him in the following letter, in which the habitual calmness of the minister appears to undergo a slight change, from contact with the feverish impetuosity of Beaumarchais:

"Versailles, April 26, 1776.

"I have laid before the king's eyes, sir, the letter you did me the honor to write to me Tuesday the 16th, and not the 12th of this month. I have the satisfaction of announcing to you that his majesty much approved of the noble and frank manner in which you repelled the attack made upon you by Lord Rochford on the subject of the American vessel destined, it is said, for Nantes, and taken to Bristol. You said nothing which his majesty would not have ordered you to say

if he could have foreseen that you would be called upon to give an explanation on a point so foreign to the duties with which you are charged.* According to Lord Rochford's tone, he would seem to base his arguments on an agreement binding us to make England's interest our own. I am not acquainted with this agreement; it does not exist in the example which England gave us when she thought she could injure us. Let it only be remembered what her conduct was with regard to us during the troubles of Corsica. I do not cite this example by way of authorizing us to follow it. A king faithful to his principles of justice does not seek to take advantage of the situation of the English in order to increase their embarrassment; but he can not take away from his subjects the protection he owes to their commerce. . . . It would be contrary to all reason and propriety to pretend that we ought not to sell any article of commerce to any person because it would be possible it might pass, at second hand, into America."

After divers details, the minister terminates thus :

"Receive all my compliments, sir. After having assured you of the king's approbation, mine ought not to appear to you very interesting; however, I can not help applauding the wisdom and firmness of your conduct, and of renewing to you the expression of my esteem.

"I am very perfectly, sir, &c.,

DE VERGENNES."

It is evident that the minister is beginning to grow fatigued with the exigences of the English cabinet, and that Beaumarchais and his plan of secret assistance are making some progress in his opinion. Beaumarchais had not yet thought of realizing this plan in the form of a commercial operation, undertaken by him with the assistance of government, but at his own risk. He asked for three millions to transmit directly, either in money or in munitions, to the agents of America.

The French ministry decided at last to accept the proposed arrangement, and to cause it to be accepted by the king; however, the prudence of M. de Vergennes rejected it in the form suggested, which appeared of too compromising a character. Beaumarchais was told "that the operation must essentially, in the eyes of the English government, and even in the eyes of the Americans, have the appearance of an individual speculation, to which the French ministers are strangers. That it

* The ostensible mission of Beaumarchais was at this moment to collect Spanish piastres at London for the service of our colonies.

may be so in appearance, it must also be so, to a certain point, in reality. We will give a million secretly, we will try to induce the court of Spain to unite with us in this affair, and supply you on its side with an equal sum; with these two millions and the co-operation of individuals who will be willing to take part in your enterprise, you will be able to found a large house of commerce, and at your own risk can supply America with arms, ammunition, articles of equipment, and all other articles necessary for keeping up the war. Our arsenals will give you arms and ammunition, but you shall replace them or shall pay for them. You shall ask for no money from the Americans, as they have none; but you shall ask them for returns in products of their soil, and we help you to get rid of them in this country, while you shall grant them, on your side, every facility possible. In a word, the operation, after being secretly supported by us at the commencement, must afterward feed and support itself; but, on the other side, as we reserve to ourselves the right of favoring or discouraging it, according to the requirements of our policy, you shall render us an account of your profits and your losses, and we will judge whether we are to accord you fresh assistance, or give you an acquittal for the sums previously granted."

Such, as we show farther on, was the true physiognomy of this operation, which was at once political and commercial. It certainly presented advantages for Beaumarchais, but it also offered many dangers; for, in addition to this first investment of two millions, it was necessary to collect money from private speculators, to risk it in a very hazardous affair, which might swallow up every thing, and swallow up, at the same time, the personal fortune of the minister's agent. Beaumarchais, in fact, once engaged in so vast an enterprise (his first cargo alone came to more than three millions), had to put the following questions to himself: What will become of my operation if my vessels are taken by the English cruisers? What will become of it if the government, frightened by the threats of the English diplomatists, not only abandon, but sacrifice me? What will become of it, finally, if the Americans are conquered, or if, after receiving my cargoes, they consider themselves at liberty to send nothing in return? Such prospects might have made

another man hesitate ; but the reader already knows that the author of "The Barber of Seville" was not afraid of difficulties. He threw himself into this one with his ordinary intrepidity, and on the 10th June, 1776, a month before the United States published their declaration of independence, he signed that famous receipt which, kept secret under the Monarchy, and given to the United States in 1794 under the Republic, occasioned a lawsuit of fifty years' duration, to which we shall return. It is conceived in the following terms :

"I have received from M. Duvergier, conformably to the orders of the Count de Vergennes, dated the 5th instant, which I have remitted to him, the sum of one million, of which I will render account to the said Count de Vergennes.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"Received one million livres tournois.

"Paris, June 10, 1776."

Two months afterward the court of Spain decided to contribute the sum of a million to the operation directed by Beaumarchais. But, in order that this subvention might be kept secret, the Spanish million, before reaching the hands of the author of "The Barber of Seville," had to make a little circuit. The Spanish ambassador paid it into the public treasury of France, and took an acknowledgment for it from the cashier ; he remitted this acknowledgment to M. de Vergennes, and the latter gave it to Beaumarchais in exchange for the following receipt, which I quote literally from the original in the Archives of Foreign Affairs :

"I have received from his excellency M. le Comte de Vergennes an acknowledgment for the million livres tournois which M. Duvergier had given to the Spanish ambassador, with which acknowledgment I shall touch, at the royal treasury, the said sum of a million tournois, for the employment of which I will render an account to his said excellency M. le Comte de Vergennes.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"At Versailles, Aug. 11, 1776."

Beginning at this day, the part of Beaumarchais in the American affair changes its nature. He passes from the position of an observer and instigator to that of an actor. He no longer merely writes Memorials : he sends off cargoes, combats against the winds, the waves, the English, and the hesi-

tations of the ministry; and when, by the very effect of his operations, war breaks out at length between France and England, he figures brilliantly in it with his *navy*. But, in order to understand the unexpected difficulties with which he is obliged to meet in his relations with the Congress of the United States, we must first of all retrace our steps for a moment, and say a word about an American who exercised a disastrous influence on this epoch of Beaumarchais' life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Arthur Lee.—Chances of a War with England.—Dr. Dubourg and Beaumarchais' "Young Ladies."—Roderigue Hortalez and Co.—Franklin and the American Deputation.—Beaumarchais' Agent in America.

It will be remembered that Beaumarchais, when eagerly endeavoring to prevail upon Louis XVI. to help the Americans secretly, did not, at first, think of undertaking the operation at his own risk and peril, without the assistance of the ministry. He only offered to transmit, himself, to the agents of America (having assured himself of their discretion), the aid which the French government was willing to give to the insurgents. He had communicated this, his first idea, to an American who was in London in 1775, and whom he had met at the house of Wilkes. This was a young Virginian named Arthur Lee, young, and then unknown, who was studying law in England when the American Revolution broke out, and who was afterward a member of the deputation from the United States to Paris, and at a later period a member of Congress. One of the most esteemed writers of America, the only one who, to my knowledge, has sketched the relations between Beaumarchais and Arthur Lee with accuracy, Mr. Jared Sparks, paints the character of the latter in the following manner: "He deserved," he says, "consideration for his natural and acquired talents. He was a good writer, and defended the cause of his country with ardor and perseverance, but his disposition was restless and violent. Jealous of his rivals, distrustful of every one, he entangled himself, and all those con-

nected with him, in a succession of disputes and difficulties.”* We must add to this portrait that Arthur Lee was devoured by ambition, and always disposed to make much of himself at the expense of others. His correspondence with the secret committee of the Congress, at the time when he formed part of the American deputation in France with Silas Deane and Franklin, is but a series of bitter and often most insulting insinuations against his two colleagues. It was not his fault that Franklin especially did not pass for a thief, and that America did not believe that it was Arthur Lee alone who had decided the alliance between the United States and France. We have before our eyes a biography of Arthur Lee, in two volumes, the author of which, who without doubt is related to the American negotiator, for he bears the same name,† seems to adopt this opinion with good faith, which is doubtless entitled to much respect, although founded on very inaccurate information. Having had occasion to study closely the works of the American deputation at Paris, we can affirm that Arthur Lee’s assistance was very insignificant, that he had no credit with the French government, which suspected him, either rightly or wrongly, of having secret connections with the English government, that he really played in connection with it the part of the fly in the fable of “*La Mouche du Coche.*” This perfectly explains his permanent irritation against his two colleagues.

Such was the man whom Beaumarchais met in London at the end of 1775, and whom he informed of his endeavors with Louis XVI. and his ministers to obtain secret assistance for the Americans. Charmed to find an opportunity of assuming importance, Arthur Lee wrote immediately to the secret committee of the Congress that, “in consequence of his *active endeavors with the ambassador of France at London, M. de Vergennes had sent to him, Arthur Lee, a secret agent, to inform him that the court of France could not think of making war against England, but was ready to send arms and ammunition to the value of five millions to Cape François, to be forwarded to the United States.*” There was not a word of truth in this infor-

* “Life of Benjamin Franklin,” by Jared Sparks, p. 447.

† “Life of Arthur Lee,” by Richard Henry Lee. Boston, 1829.

mation. M. de Vergennes had sent no agent to Arthur Lee to make him promises of this kind. Beaumarchais had seen him at the house of Wilkes, and had spoken to him of his plans, his hopes, and of the Memorials he was addressing to the French government.

Arthur Lee, to give himself importance in the eyes of Congress, had completely changed the nature of this conversation, and the proof that the invention came from him, and not from Beaumarchais is, that at the very moment when this latter was soliciting in vain, from this secret, aid from M. de Vergennes, joining to his entreaties those of Arthur Lee, who declared himself ready to come to Paris if the minister desired it. The strange exaggerations of the young American had naturally made a lively impression on the secret committee of the Congress. It was the first news of the kind which arrived in America; so, it was concluded that Arthur Lee was a very clever negotiator, and as, just before the receipt of this news, the committee had just sent a private agent, Silas Deane, to France, to request the very assistance which Arthur Lee assured them was already promised, it intended to make the latter a joint agent with the former.

In the mean time Beaumarchais continued his solicitations to M. de Vergennes, who not only had promised nothing, but always refused. The colonies' chances of triumph were still too uncertain to justify the risk of a war with England—a war which would necessarily result, if through any indiscretion of the Americans it was divulged that this assistance had been given them. How was this danger to be guarded against? We have seen that Beaumarchais proposed several means in his Memorials to the king. The surest seemed to be to change the appearance of the operation, by concealing from the insurgents themselves the source of the assistance they received, and instead of giving them aid gratuitously, to assist in secret several commercial houses,* which would thus be enabled to

* A letter from M. de Vergennes to Louis XVI., a letter from Louis XVI. to the King of Spain, published in M. de Flassan's "*Histoire de la Diplomatie Française*," and some other documents found among Beaumarchais' papers, induce me to think that different merchants did in fact receive subventions like Beaumarchais, and for the same end.

send them stores, allowing them to be paid for in kind, and at the same time supporting all the losses the English cruisers might inflict on this prohibited description of commerce. Who can not understand, indeed, that from the day when the cabinet of Versailles, following the example given it by England, both in the war with Corsica and in our civil wars of the sixteenth century, decided to assist the insurgents in this indirect mode, in order to avoid war, it was natural for it not only to allow, but to desire that the assistance should not be furnished gratuitously? Such gratuitous assistance would have manifestly revealed this co-operation to England.

When Beaumarchais returned from London to Paris, he kept up a correspondence with Arthur Lee in ciphers. When it had been agreed between M. de Vergennes and himself that the affair should bear a strictly private and commercial character, and that the participation of government should be carefully concealed from the Americans themselves, Beaumarchais, in conformance with ministerial instructions, wrote the following note to Arthur Lee, in London, June 12, 1776 :

"The difficulties I have met with in my negotiations with the ministry have made me decide to *form a company*, which will send the ammunition and powder to *your friend* as soon as possible, in consideration of tobacco being sent in return to the French cape."

Upon this, Silas Deane, the American agent, sent direct to France by the Congress, arrived. As he alone was furnished by the Congress with power to treat in their name, Beaumarchais made his agreements with him, and did not write again to Arthur Lee. The latter had relied upon this affair to make himself popular in America. "He hoped," says the author of the "Life of Franklin," "to play the principal part in the enterprise. On hearing that it was passing into the hands of Mr. Deane, he hurried to Paris, accused Deane of interfering in his affairs, tried to cause a quarrel between him and Beaumarchais, and, not being able to succeed, returned to London vexed at his failure and furious with Deane."* To this very exact account of Mr. Jared Sparks' we must add, that he was not less furious with Beaumarchais than with Deane. In order to avenge himself on both, he wrote without their knowl-

* "Life of Franklin," by J. Sparks, p. 449.

edge to the secret committee of the Congress that the two had agreed to deceive both the French government and the United States by changing what the ministry meant to be a gratuitous gift into a commercial transaction. It was this insidious story of Arthur Lee's which caused all the trouble between Beaumarchais and the Congress. We shall soon see M. de Vergennes himself speaking very pointedly on the subject; but as his official answer, at the time when it was addressed to the Congress, might be looked upon as dictated by political expediency, we ought, in exhibiting the arrangements made between Silas Deane and Beaumarchais, under the very eyes of the minister, to endeavor to discover the real intentions of the latter in an affair about which, owing to its very secrecy, he has naturally left but few documents in his own handwriting.

A first proof of the falseness of the assertions made by Arthur Lee is given us by one of those rather comic incidents which, in the life of the author of "The Barber of Seville," are always mixed up with the most serious things, and which we must relate because it tends to support our theory. When Silas Deane, the first agent of the Congress, arrived in Paris, in July, 1776, Beaumarchais, although the most ardent, was not the only advocate the insurgents had with the minister. An old physician, named Dubourg, who understood botany very well, who had formerly been intimate with Franklin in England, and who was very active in the cause of the Americans, rivaled him in zeal. Franklin, before being sent himself to France, had sent Silas Deane to Dr. Dubourg. This doctor, in whom M. de Vergennes placed much trust, had been confidentially informed of the intentions of the minister to give his assistance secretly to different commercial enterprises which were to send provisions to the Americans, and he was in hopes that he and some friends would be chosen to direct an enterprise of this kind, when he heard that the minister, who was apparently more convinced of Beaumarchais' ability than of his, had given him the preference.

Vexed at being supplanted by the author of "The Barber of Seville," the old doctor wrote the following letter to M. de Vergennes:

"Monseigneur,—I saw M. de Beaumarchais this morning, and I willingly conferred with him without reserve. Every body is acquainted with his ability, and no one does more justice than I to his rectitude, his discretion, and his zeal for all that is good and great. I believe him to be one of the most fit men in the world for political negotiations, but perhaps, at the same time, one of the least fitted for negotiating in a mercantile sense. He likes splendor; it is asserted that he maintains young ladies at his expense; in short, he passes for a prodigal; and in France, *there is no merchant nor manufacturer who is not of this opinion, and who would not hesitate very much to transact the least business with him.* For this reason, I was much surprised to hear that you had not only commissioned him to assist us with his intelligence, but that you have concentrated in him *the entire and particular direction of all the commerce, exports as well as imports, either of munitions of war, or of the usual products of France to the United Colonies and of the Colonies to France; the direction of all business, the arrangement of prices, the conclusion of all treaties, the making of all engagements, &c.* I agreed with him that the advantage of having all these affairs managed a little more secretly might be the result; but I represented to him that in taking all this immense traffic upon himself, and by excluding people who had gone to much expense, suffered so much fatigue, and run so many dangers during the year for the service of the Congress, he would be giving them cause to accuse him of monopoly; he told me it could not possibly injure them, and used all his eloquence to prove this to me. I acknowledge that these private motives would not alone be sufficient to weigh against the secrecy necessary for such a critical position; but I must be allowed to think that there are other if not better means of insuring this important secret. There may be a hundred, there may be a thousand persons in France, who, with talents very inferior to those of M. de Beaumarchais, could accomplish your wishes better by inspiring all those with whom they may have to treat with more confidence."

Before relating how the author of "The Barber of Seville" refuted the old doctor's accusations, we must observe how important this letter is as throwing light upon a question which it was rather difficult to penetrate, and which has given rise to the most bitter disputes in the United States.

This letter, which proves that Dr. Dubourg was acquainted with the minister's intentions, also proves clearly, by the passages in italics, that in granting secret aid to the commercial company founded by Beaumarchais, M. de Vergennes did not

intend that the operations of this house should only have a *fictitious* commercial character. It proves, in fine, that there was an intention of assisting several real merchants; it also proves that the minister thought the enterprise would support itself with the money of traders, and that it would be kept up by the profits resulting from the returns in kind, on which Beaumarchais had a right to count, according to the formal engagements entered into by the agent of the Congress.

We must now describe the effect produced by Dr. Dubourg's accusing Beaumarchais to M. de Vergennes of keeping ladies in his house. The minister, notwithstanding his gravity, thought it would be a joke to send the doctor's letter to Beaumarchais, who, without doubt, to amuse M. de Vergennes, sent him a copy of his answer to Dr. Dubourg. It was conceived in the following terms:

"Tuesday, 16th July, 1776.

"Till M. le Comte de Vergennes showed me your letter to him, sir, I found it impossible to understand the one with which you had honored me. I could not conceive what was meant by the gentleman *who will not and can not undertake any thing with me.** I very well understand now that you wished to give yourself time to write to the minister about me; but, in order to receive true information, was it necessary to give him false? How does it affect our business if I like pomp and splendor, and maintain young ladies in my house? The ladies in my house, who have been there for twenty years, sir, are your very humble servants. They were five in number, four sisters and a niece. During the last three years two of these girls have died, to my great sorrow. I now only keep three, two sisters and my niece, which is, however, display enough for a private individual like myself. But what would you have thought if, knowing me better, you had been aware that I carried the scandal so far as to keep men too—two nephews, very young and rather good-looking, and even the miserable father who brought such a scandalous person into the world?† As for my love of splendor, that is much

* This passage alludes to Silas Deane, who had just arrived, and whom Beaumarchais had not yet seen, because Dr. Dubourg had dissuaded him from associating with him.

† This answer of Beaumarchais was, it appears, very successful in the family, for I find Julie taking up the subject, and writing to her brother a letter which commences thus: "*Monsieur l'entrepreneur*, I feel myself compelled to tell you that your letter to the doctor has made quite a hit among us; the girls you keep are 'your very humble serv-

worse. For three years I have considered lace and embroidered clothes too mean for my vanity, and have been proud enough to have my wrists ornamented with the finest plain muslin. The most superb black cloth is not too splendid for me, and I have sometimes carried my love of dress so far as to wear silk when it is very warm ; but I beg of you, sir, not to tell this to M. de Vergennes ; you would quite ruin me in his opinion. You had your reasons for writing against me to him without knowing me, I have mine for not being offended, although I have the honor of knowing you. You are, sir, a good man, so inflamed with the desire of doing much good that you consider yourself entitled to do a little mischief in order to succeed. This is not exactly the moral of the Gospel, but I have known many people adopt it. It was in this sense that, in order to convert heathens, the Fathers of the Church allowed themselves to make quotations of doubtful authenticity, holy calumnies which they named pious frauds among themselves. But an end to joking. I am not out of temper, because M. de Vergennes is not a small-minded man, and I can rely upon his answer. Let those whom I ask for advances in business mistrust me ; I consent to it ; but let those who are animated by true zeal for the common friends whose interests are at stake think twice before forsaking an honorable man who offers to render every service, and to make every advance which would be useful to those friends. Do you now understand me, sir ?

"I shall have the honor of seeing you this afternoon sufficiently early to find you all together. I have also that of being, with the greatest respect, sir, your very humble and obedient servant, well known under the name of *Roderigue Hortalez and Company*."*

ants,' but on condition of your increasing their allowance ;" and, after developing this idea, Julie concludes, as usual, with some verses, which are more lively than poetical, such as she took a pleasure in introducing into every thing she wrote :

"For if you will believe us,
You will much increase the glory
Of the favors with which you load us,
By doubling the sum you allow us.

"I am in expectation of this wished-for moment, Monsieur l'entre-teneur. Yours, &c., JULIE B."

It is probable that Julie gained an increased allowance through the doctor's letter.

* Dr. Dubourg always had a spite against Beaumarchais on account of the preference shown him by M. de Vergennes, and as he was very intimate with Franklin when the latter rejoined Silas Deane in France, the doctor set him against Beaumarchais, which was a new obstacle in addition to all those which already crossed his path. But the doctor

Spain having already brought good fortune to the author of "The Barber of Seville," it was under the name of "Rodrigue Hortalez & Co.," which was intended to mislead the English ambassador, that Beaumarchais concealed the fact that he was secretly assisted by the court of France. Notwithstanding the disinclination of Dr. Dubourg, Beaumarchais and Silas Deane came together at last. The agent of the Congress had been secretly presented by this same Dr. Dubourg to M. de Vergennes, on the 17th of July, 1776. The position of the rebellious colonies was at this time very critical. They struggled with courage, but they had exhausted the ruinous resource of paper money. They were in want of arms and ammunition, their troops were half naked, while England, resolved to sacrifice every thing to crush the rebellion, had sent General Howe with considerable reinforcements to America. The American troops had lost several battles, and the Congress itself was on the point of being driven from Philadelphia, which was occupied by the English, to take refuge in Baltimore. The next campaign was to be decisive; and it was generally supposed in Europe that the Americans would be crushed. In this state of affairs, the Congress sent Silas Deane to Paris, to try and obtain, on credit from the government or from private individuals, two hundred cannons, arms, ammunition, and clothing, and tents for 25,000 men. M. de Vergennes naturally gave a formal refusal to the agent of the Congress, founded upon the pacific relations between France and England. But he directed him to go to Beaumarchais, describing him as a *merchant* who might perhaps assist him on reasonable terms. The next day Beaumarchais wrote the following letter to Silas Deane:

"Paris, 18th July, 1776.

"I do not know, sir, whether you have any trustworthy person with you to translate French letters on important business. For my part, I shall not be able to correspond with you in English till the arrival of a person whom I expect from London, and who will

was punished for his jealousy, for, not being able to obtain the co-operation of the ministry in his commercial projects, he fitted out a little ship on his own account. This ship was taken and confiscated by the English, who awarded the doctor's little property to themselves *gratis*.

interpret for us.* Meanwhile, I have the honor of informing you that some time ago I formed the project of assisting the brave Americans to throw off the English yoke. I have tried several means of opening a safe and secret correspondence between the Congress and a house of business which I am about to form, for the purpose of providing the Americans with those things which they require, and can not obtain from England. I have already mentioned my plan to a gentleman† in London, who professes to be much attached to America; but as our correspondence has been continued with difficulty and in cipher, I have received no answer to my last letter, in which I settled a few points in this great and important affair. Since you are endowed with a disposition, sir, in which I can place confidence, I shall be happy to renew, in a more certain and regular manner, a negotiation which has only begun to bud as yet. My means are not at present very considerable, but they will increase very much if we can arrange a treaty together, the conditions of which are honorable and advantageous, and the fulfillment exact.

“I have the honor to be, sir, yours, &c.,

“CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.”‡

It will be seen that from the very beginning of the transactions between Beaumarchais and the agent of the Congress, there was no ambiguity about the nature of the affair. It was not a gift which Beaumarchais was to make, but a commercial treaty, which was to be strictly fulfilled. However, as it would have been too great a chance for any real merchant to undertake this action at his sole risk and peril, and as the author of “*The Barber of Seville*” was not a merchant by profession, it was not difficult for Silas Deane to suspect, even if he had not known it from Dr. Dubourg, that the man to whom he was desired to address himself was more or less upheld by the ministry. While recognizing Beaumarchais, then, to be

* Silas Deane knew very little French; all his letters, both to the ministers and to Beaumarchais, are written in English, and Beaumarchais, although he had lived in England, knew nothing of English but the celebrated word which he has given in “*The Marriage of Figaro*” as the foundation of the language.

† It will be understood that the gentleman in question was Arthur Lee.

‡ Not having been able to find among Beaumarchais’ papers this first letter of his, which is important for all that follows, I have been obliged to reproduce it, as exactly as possible, from an English translation, which is among the documents given to the Congress of the United States by Silas Deane.

what he was represented to be, that is to say, a trader acting in his name, he was (in the absence of the guilty connivance of which Arthur Lee very unjustly accused him) to keep the ministry informed of all the engagements which this merchant desired him to make. And he did so, as is proved by the following letter, written by Silas Deane, under the date of July 19, 1776, to the confidential secretary of M. de Vergennes, M. Gérard, afterward ambassador from France to the United States, and then First Commissioner of Foreign Affairs. This letter proves that Silas Deane informed M. Gérard of the first letter of M. de Beaumarchais, whom he had not seen, and asked his advice as to what he should do. "I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing M. de Beaumarchais," writes Silas Deane to M. Gérard, "but I am quite confident, from what you have told me of him, that he will be able to procure the things I require, and that I ought to address myself to him in preference to any one else. I think he would provide me with every thing mentioned in my instructions with the greatest secrecy and certainty." The same day the first conference took place between Beaumarchais and the agent of the Congress, for the next day Silas Deane wrote the following letter to Beaumarchais :

"Paris, Hotel Grand-Villars, 20th July, 1776.

"Monsieur,—In conformance with your request at our interview yesterday, I inclose you a copy of my commission and an extract from my instructions, which will prove to you that I am authorized to make the acquisitions for which I have applied to you. In order to enable you to understand this extract, I must inform you that I was first desired to address myself to the ministers, that I might either purchase or borrow from them the provisions necessary for us; and in case the credit and influence of the Congress should not be sufficient in the present circumstances, I was commissioned to try and procure them somewhere else. I have already informed you of my request to the minister and of his answer.

"With regard to the credit which we require for the provisions and ammunition which I hope to obtain from you, a long credit will not, I trust, be necessary. A year is the longest credit my compatriots are accustomed to take, and the Congress having bought a quantity of tobacco in Virginia and Maryland, together with some other articles which will be embarked as soon as ships can be procured, I have no doubt that considerable returns in kind will be made

to you between now and six months time, and that all will be paid in the course of a year. This is what I shall press on the Congress in my letter. In the mean while, the result of the war is uncertain, and our commerce may suffer by it; but I hope that, whatever may happen, you will soon receive sufficiently considerable returns to be able to wait. In case any sum remains due to you after the credit agreed upon has expired, it is perfectly understood that the usual interest shall be allowed you for that sum.

"As soon as you have been able to get this letter and the inclosed translated, I shall have the honor to pay you a visit. Meanwhile I am, with all respect and attachment, yours, &c.,

"SILAS DEANE."

Beaumarchais answered this letter of Silas Deane's by a letter dated the 22d July, in which, after agreeing to the payment in natural products, and to the delay demanded by the agent of the Congress, he speaks in the following manner about the price of the provisions:

"As I believe that I am to deal with a virtuous nation, it will be enough for me to keep an exact account of all I advance. The Congress will be at liberty to pay the usual value of the things on their arrival, or to allow so much for the cost price, the delays and the inconvenience, with a commission in proportion to the trouble and care, which it is impossible to arrange now. I wish to serve your country as if it were my own, and I hope to find in the friendship of a noble-minded nation the true reward of the labor which I willingly undertake for them."

The agent of the Congress agrees to this arrangement with gratitude in the following letter, which will at the same time give us an idea of the difficulties of the undertaking, and consequently of the services rendered by Beaumarchais to the United States:

"Paris, 24th July, 1776.

"Sir,—I read attentively the letter with which you honored me on the 22d, and I think your propositions concerning the arrangement for paying the merchandise and ammunition are most just and equitable. The generous confidence which you place in the virtue and justice of my constituents causes me the greatest joy, gives me the greatest hopes of the success of the enterprise, both to their satisfaction and yours, and causes me to assure you again that the United States will take the most efficacious means to send you the natural products, and to justify in every way the feelings you have for them. However, as the cost of the clothing alone would amount to two or

three millions, and as the cannons, the arms, and ammunition will greatly increase the sum, I can not, on account of the uncertainty with which ships arrive during war time, go so far as to assure you that the returns for the whole will reach you within the time specified; but in that case, as I have already said, you will, I believe, be allowed interest for the balance. As for the cargoes sent from America, either to France or to the West Indies, in return for your advances, I think there can be no objection to their being addressed either to your house in France or to your agents in whatever place they may arrive.

"I see that the exportation of cannons, arms, and war ammunition is prohibited, and that consequently these things can only be exported in secret. This circumstance causes me much uneasiness; for if I can not land them publicly, I also can not procure them openly without causing alarm, which would perhaps be fatal to our operations. You know that the English ambassador is very attentive to all I do, and that his spies watch every movement of those with whom I am connected. In such a situation, and knowing so little of your language, I foresee many difficulties which I hardly know how to face, and which will perhaps embarrass even you, notwithstanding your superior intelligence and ability. You will agree that two things are at present as essential as cannons and arms: the first is, that they should be of good quality,* and the second, that they should be embarked without being stopped and detained. The fate of my country depends greatly on the arrival of this assistance. I can not be too anxious on the subject, and there is no danger nor expense, however great, which ought not to be risked, if necessary, for such an important object. I beg of you to reflect deeply on the subject, and to write me what you think of it. I went to your house to-day with Dr. Bancroft with the intention of conferring on the subject with you, but you had gone to Versailles. Allow me to call your attention particularly to the latter subjects, and to assure you that I have the honor to be, with the greatest respect, sir, yours, &c.,

"SILAS DEANE."

We consider these letters sufficient to decide the precise nature of the affair, and the very formal and incontestable engagements made by the agent of the Congress. We have con-

* It has often been stated by writers that the supplies provided by Beaumarchais for the Congress were generally of inferior quality. There may have been neglect in some particulars, which may be explained by the difficulties with which the affair was surrounded, but, on the whole, the accusation has no foundation. I see by Beaumarchais' papers that the American agents carefully inspected the cargoes before their departure.

sidered it necessary to enter into these details because the result was most extraordinary. If a fresh proof is necessary that neither Beaumarchais nor Silas Deane made their arrangements without the knowledge of the minister, I can give one by quoting a passage from a letter from Silas Deane to M. de Vergennes, dated November 18, 1776, which shows that the agent for the Congress, acknowledging as he did the position taken by the government, which declared itself a perfect stranger to the affair, nevertheless kept the minister informed of what passed between him and Beaumarchais.

"I write to you," says Silas Deane to M. de Vergennes, "in consequence of your interview with M. de Beaumarchais this morning. I wish for your general direction and advice on this delicate, critical, and important business, before any ulterior and public operation."

This operation was indeed a most difficult one, for it related to a kind of commerce which was officially prohibited, the prohibition of which was rigorously watched over by the English ambassador, and which was only to receive the support of the French government so long as this support was kept secret. The least indiscretion, the least diplomatic embarrassment it occasioned, would change the assistance of the ministry to persecution. It was on these conditions that the author of "The Barber of Seville" was to take quietly, and by installments, from the different state arsenals, 200 cannons, mortars, shells, cannon balls; 25,000 guns, 290,000 pounds of powder;* to get clothing and tents for 25,000 men; to col-

* It seems that the Americans were at this time in want of powder. They were doubtless not perfect enough in the way of making it to obtain it at home. We must mention here that the arms and ammunition taken from the state arsenals were not given gratis to Beaumarchais. This we learn from an unpublished letter from the minister of war, Count de St. Germain, dated 25th August, 1776, to the Count de Vergennes, which I have extracted from Beaumarchais' papers. "This company," writes M. de St. Germain, "will pay in ready money for the cannon at the rate of forty sous per pound of metal, the cast iron at the rate of ninety francs per thousand, and the guns at twenty-three francs. *In case it should ask for time, it would give good security.*"

In another letter addressed to Beaumarchais, dated 30th June, 1776, the minister of war writes to him about the powder which had been sent for, and which was to be replaced in three months: "I should tell you that the powder which you will have to replace can not be received till after having been tried according to the regulations."

lect these things in different ports, to send them to the insurgents, and to do all this without arousing the suspicions of the English ambassador. But it was not in vain that Beaumarchais had taken for his motto, "My life is a combat." When once made sure of the consequences of the affair by the arrangements of Silas Deane, he hired an immense house, called the Hotel de Hollande, in the Faubourg du Peuple, installed himself in it with his officers and clerks, and in a single day, from being a comic author, became a Spanish merchant, known by the name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co. In a few months, in the midst of obstacles too long to narrate, he had collected at Havre and Nantes all the above-named articles. Silas Deane had promised to provide American ships for conveying the cargoes, but these ships did not come, and it was important that the aid should arrive in time for the campaign of 1777. Beaumarchais arranged with some shipowners, and provided the vessels. Owing to a letter from Arthur Lee, who accused him of it as a crime afterward, Silas Deane requested that some artillery and engineer officers might be enrolled and sent at the same time as the cannons and the cannon balls. Beaumarchais prevailed upon the minister to close his eyes to this new operation. He himself enlisted forty or fifty officers, who were to go singly to Havre, and embark under the conduct of a superior officer of artillery named Ducoudray.*

* These officers, who were enrolled by Beaumarchais and Silas Deane, and who preceded Lafayette to America, had not all the same success. Many had pretensions superior to their capacity; the Americans, on their side, were very jealous, and quarrels arose. It was Beaumarchais, however, who sent those French and foreign officers who distinguished themselves the most after Lafayette, such as the Marquis de La Rouërie, much loved by Washington, of whom Chateaubriand speaks in his "*Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*," the Count de Conway, an Irishman, the Polish general Pulawski, and particularly the old general Steuben, a fellow-soldier of Frederick's, who rendered great service by setting the American militia on a good footing. It is amusing to find the author of "*The Barber of Seville*" recommending this old general to the Congress, and writing on war. "The art of making war successfully," said he, "being the fruit of courage, united with prudence, talent, and experience, a fellow-soldier of Frederick the Great, who did not leave his side for twenty-two years, seems to all of us to be one of the fittest men to second M. Washington."

However, notwithstanding all the precautions taken, the expedition had made some noise. We read in a letter from the lieutenant of police to M. de Vergennes, dated December 12, 1776, the following lines: "The arrival of Dr. Franklin at Nantes creates much sensation, and the departure of M. de Beaumarchais, who is said to have gone to Havre, does not cause less." To avoid any quarrel with the English ambassador, it had been decided among the ministers that this embarkment of officers and ammunition should be represented as destined by the minister of the Admiralty for the French colonies; but the expedition was considerable, merchant ships were employed instead of government vessels, the officers who were to embark had been indiscreet, and the presence of Beaumarchais at Havre greatly increased the anxiety of the English ambassador. Although the author of "The Barber of Seville" had set out under the name of Durand, if we may judge by a letter from one of the officers to Silas Deane, he had betrayed his incognito by occupying himself characteristically with literary affairs during this important business. "I think," writes this officer, "that M. de Beaumarchais' journey has done more harm than good: he is known by many people, and he has made himself known to the whole town by having his comedies played, and by hearing the actors repeat their parts, so as to play them better. All this has rendered his precaution of concealing himself under the name of Durand perfectly useless."

Beaumarchais, on the contrary, declares that he alone had been able to check the indiscretion of the officers. However this may have been, Lord Stormont had addressed the most vehement remonstrances to the government. The king, who did not wish for war, and the ministry, who were not in a position to make it, feared to advance too far. A counter order had been sent to Havre and Nantes, forbidding the officers to embark and the ships to start; but when the counter order arrived, the strongest of Beaumarchais' three ships, the "Amphitrite," with the greater part of the officers and munitions, had already set sail. The two others were alone detained. Beaumarchais returned in all haste, and took the greatest trouble to obtain the revocation of the counter order. The

following note from M. de Vergennes to his first clerk, M. Gérard, shows how delicate the position of ministers was in an affair of this kind :

"M. de Beaumarchais," says M. de Vergennes, "writes to me on the same subject, and observes that he wishes to have this permission (the revocation of the counter order) from me ; but I shall take care not to give it him, although *I have it in writing* ;* but, as M. de Sartines has very fortunately been charged with this commission, and I shall send it to him, I beg of you to express yourself accordingly in your answer to the Americans, without letting them see through the masks."

At last Beaumarchais obtained leave to send off the two other ships ; but, just as they were going to set sail, news arrived that the "*Amphitrite*," which was supposed to be far away, instead of continuing her voyage, had stopped twice, once at Nantes and once at Lorient, where the ship still was, because the accommodation on board did not satisfy M. Ducoudray. This caused fresh complaints from Lord Stormont. M. de Vergennes, irritated at being again compromised, withdrew the revocation of the counter order which Beaumarchais had received. M. Ducoudray wrote him a letter, which was full of confused explanations and excuses. Beaumarchais, enraged, answered as follows :

"Paris, 22d January, 1777.

"Sir,—As your whole conduct in this affair is inexplicable, I shall not take the useless trouble of studying it. It will be sufficient for me to protect myself and my friends from it for the future. Consequently, and as real owner of the vessel '*Amphitrite*,' I order Captain Fautrelle to take the sole command of it. You are intelligent enough to be sure that I have not taken this step without first consulting some powerful and wise friends. Consequently, you will have the kindness, sir, to obey, or to find another ship and go where you please, as I have no intention of interfering with you in any thing but what relates to me, and may injure me. On the receipt of this letter, you will kindly put Captain Fautrelle in possession of all the parcels, orders, and letters relating to the delivery of the cargo of his ship, and

* This seems to me to show that, on account of the serious consequences which might result from the government taking part in Beaumarchais' operations, each minister, when some decision had to be taken, required a written order from the king's hand. I see no other way of explaining M. de V.'s phrase.

to send me by M. de Francy an account in detail of all you have spent in your astonishing and very unnecessary voyages, if it be your intention to make us pay the expenses, which question will be decided by the committee of our affairs. I have the honor, &c.,

“CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.”

At the same time Beaumarchais wrote to his confidential agent, M. de Francy,* who had set off for Lorient :

“Paris, 28th January, 1777.

“I must say, like Bartholo, ‘the devil has interfered in my business,’ and we must remedy the past evil as well as we can by preventing its recurrence. Give the inclosed letter to M. Ducoudray. I send it you open, that you may answer for me any objections he may make. Show Captain Fautrelle the order, which we send to him with this, as proprietor of the vessel which he commands, and take his word of honor for his exact fulfillment of it. Yesterday I received with your letter one from my nephew. As childish as the others, my nephew seems uneasy about going on board the ‘Amphitrite.’† You may think how little attention I pay to this puerility ; recommend him again to the care of M. de Conway, and to Chevalier de Bore. Order the captain to receive on board the Marquis de la

* One word about this M. de Francy, who will be often mentioned. He was a distinguished young man, in whom Beaumarchais placed great confidence, and whom he afterward sent as his representative to America, where he was very useful to him. Francy served his patron loyally, and, to Beaumarchais’ great satisfaction, made a large fortune ; unfortunately, he was consumptive, and died young. I have many letters from him, which contain very interesting details about persons and things in America at the time of the Revolution, and which, while doing honor to his intelligence and the loftiness of his sentiments, prove the sincerity and vivacity of an affection which was shared by all who approached Beaumarchais. I should add that Théveneau de Francy was the younger brother of Théveneau de Morande, who was mentioned in one of our former chapters, but in his idea of morality he did not resemble his brother ; accordingly, Beaumarchais, while keeping one at a distance, had discerned the merit of the other, and had become attached to him.

† This nephew of Beaumarchais, a son of the watchmaker De Lépine, and who had taken the name of Des Epiniens, set out for America as an artillery officer. The evening before one of the battles he wrote to his uncle : “Your nephew, my dear uncle, may be killed, but he will never do any thing unworthy of a person who has the honor of being related to you. This is as certain as that he will always feel the greatest affection for the best uncle living.” Des Epiniens died, I believe, in America, holding the rank of major.

Rouërie, who has been particularly recommended to us. Give the captain the general and secret directions as to his real route, and what he is to do when arrived at his destination. If circumstances oblige him to stop at St. Domingo, tell him and Conway not to remain there, but to write M. le Comte d'Emery from the Roads,* saying that unfortunate circumstances alone have determined the fictitious course of the 'Amphitrite' toward St. Domingo, and to take from him a fresh fictitious order for France, so as to shelter himself under this order in case of meeting with an English vessel between St. Domingo and the true destination of the ship. You know very well that all the precautions of the ministry are taken by agreement with us; this can be relied upon.

"Immediately after the departure of the 'Amphitrite' we shall go to Nantes, where I fear, however, you will find the 'Mercure' gone, for she is ready to set sail. Good-by, my dear Francy; come back quickly to Paris. You will have traveled enough for one time; other tasks wait you here; but I will share the labor. Bring me back this letter."

In spite of all these *contretemps*, Beaumarchais' first three ships were at last able to start. They were fortunate enough to escape the English cruisers, and arrived at the commencement of the campaign of 1777 in the roads of Portsmouth. On receiving, for the first time from Europe, such a cargo of cannons, powder, guns, coats, and shoes for 25,000 men, the Americans who were assembled on the shore applauded vehemently. On his part, the American agent at Paris, Silas Deane, on the 29th November, 1776, wrote as follows to the secret committee of the Congress:

"I should never have succeeded in fulfilling my mission without the indefatigable, generous, and intelligent efforts of M. de Beaumarchais, to whom the United States owe more in every respect than to any other person on this side of the ocean. He is greatly in advance for ammunition, articles of clothing, equipment, and other things, and I firmly trust that you will let him have considerable returns as promptly as possible. He wrote you by M. Macrery, and he will write to you again by this ship. I could not in a letter render full justice to M. de Beaumarchais for his skill and zeal in maintaining our cause; all I can say is, that in this operation he has acted in accordance with the most large and liberal principles, and that he has made our affairs entirely his own. His influence and reputation,

* The Governor of St. Domingo.

which are great, have been entirely employed in serving our interests, and I hope the result will be equal to his desires."

Beaumarchais naturally expected to receive as quickly as possible from the Congress plenty of thanks, and plenty of tobacco from Virginia and Maryland; he did not even receive an answer to his letters. These returns, which, after the formal promises of Silas Deane, were to have arrived in six months, did not arrive at all. Beaumarchais sent two more ships with two more cargoes, but no news from the Congress. Silas Deane was confused, and could not explain this silence. Both of them had reckoned without Arthur Lee, who had just been appointed, with Franklin, to the American deputation in France. Franklin arrived at Paris in December, 1776; Arthur Lee arrived at the end of the same month. His first confidential letter to the secret committee of the Congress, dated January 3, 1777, is very characteristic: "The politics of this court," he writes, "are in a kind of trembling agitation." It would never be guessed why.

"It is because," adds Lee, "the promises which were made to me by the French agent in London, and which I communicate to you through M. Storey, have not been entirely fulfilled. The change in the mode of transmission from what had been promised had been planned with M. Deane, whom Hortalez or Beaumarchais found here on his return from London, and with whom all arrangements have been made."

In another confidential letter Lee has the audacity to write:

"M. de Vergennes, the minister and his secretary, have repeatedly assured us that no return was expected for the cargoes sent by Beaumarchais. This gentleman is not a merchant; he is known to be a political agent, employed by the court of France."

The documents we have quoted, the very plain declaration of M. de Vergennes, which we shall quote in its place, as well as the letters from Beaumarchais to the minister, authorize us in affirming that this assertion of Arthur Lee's was a remarkable falsehood. He appears himself to suffer some trouble from this falsehood, for in a letter which follows the one we have just quoted, he writes, "*The ministry has often given us to understand that we had nothing to pay for the cargoes supplied by Beaumarchais; however, the latter, with a perseverance of adventurers of his kind, persists in his demands.*"

It is useless to call attention to the fact that the letters of this kind are always letters signed by Arthur Lee alone, and written without the knowledge of his two colleagues. Placed between the contradictory affirmations of Silas Deane and Arthur Lee, the secret committee of the Congress waited for Franklin's evidence, and Franklin remained silent. From the first day of the meeting of the three American commissioners at Paris, Deane and Arthur Lee were at daggers drawn. Franklin, already prejudiced against the author of "*The Barber of Seville*," by his friend, Dr. Dubourg, and in the vain hope of being at peace with Arthur Lee, had resolved to sacrifice Beaumarchais to him, declaring to Deane that he would not, in any way, interfere with the transactions made between the two. It must be added to this that this same officer, Ducoudray, whom we have already seen so sharply reprimanded by Beaumarchais, had arrived in America, furious against him, and that, after writing him in France the most perplexed and the most humble letter, he had commenced in the United States by publishing a calumnious pamphlet about him.*

To complete, finally, our explanation of the attitude of the secret committee of the Congress, which would otherwise be inexplicable, we must say that the letters of Beaumarchais himself were sufficiently strange, from their mixture of the patriotic and mercantile spirit, both equally sincere with him, to inspire distrust in minds already prejudiced. Only imagine serious Yankees, who had nearly all been traders before becoming soldiers, receiving masses of cargoes, which were frequently embarked by stealth during the night, and the invoices of which consequently presented some irregularities, and all this without any other letters of advice than the rather bombastic missives signed with the romantic name of Roderigue Hortalez & Co., in which Beaumarchais mixed up protestations of enthusiasm, offers of unlimited service and political advice, with applications for tobacco, indigo, or salt fish, and which ended with tirades, of which we may take the following as an example:

* Shortly after his arrival in America, this officer, who was the brother of the celebrated barrister Tronçon-Ducoudray, was drowned at the passage of a river.

"Gentlemen, consider my house as the head of all operations useful to your cause in Europe, and myself as the most zealous partisan of your nation, *the soul of your successes*, and a man profoundly filled with the respectful esteem with which I have the honor to be, &c.,

"RODERIGUE HORTALEZ & Co."

The calculating disposition of the Yankees naturally inclined them to think that so ardent and fantastic a being, if, after all, such a being really existed, was playing a commercial comedy, agreed upon between the French government and himself, and that they might, in all security of conscience, make use of his supplies, read his amplifications, and dispense with sending him tobacco. Beaumarchais, however, was in a cruel position. Relying upon the execution of the engagement made by the agent of the Congress, he had set up his undertaking on an immense scale, he had freighted ships, made contracts with shipowners, entered into partnership with merchants,* and given considerable orders. In September, 1777, he had sent to the Congress cargoes to the amount of five millions, without even receiving an answer to the letters sent with them. The Congress persisted in regarding him as a fictitious personage. In vain he wrote to it in December, 1777, "I am exhausted, both as regards money and credit. Relying too much on returns so many times promised, I have gone far beyond my own funds and those of my friends. I have even exhausted other powerful aid, which I had first of all obtained

* I see, from his papers, that he had partners of different kinds, shipowners, merchants, and even of a kind which would scarcely have been expected; for instance, in the following year, when he was trading not only with the Congress of the United States, but with private individuals, he wrote to the supercargo of one of his ships, under date of March 14th, 1778, "In the general invoice that you will have to send me of the entire supply of the items which concern the Marquis de Saint-Aignan and the Marquis of Aubespine, instead of putting their names in full, only indicate them by initials; they may desire one day that their names should not be mentioned in a commercial affair; and provided they and myself can understand it, that will be sufficient for the present." Thus the taste for commerce was not exclusively the attribute of the author of "The Barber of Seville:" we find the highest nobles, who, instead of going to "get their heads broken with the insurgents," as used to be said at the time, preferred selling their little stores through the medium of Beaumarchais.

under the express promise of returning it before long." The documents deposited in the Archives of Foreign Affairs prove, nevertheless, that in this same year, 1777, M. de Vergennes, taking into consideration the desperate troubles in which Beaumarchais found himself plunged through the obstinacy of the Congress in refusing him returns, advanced to him successively, May 31st, 400,000 livres, June 16th, 200,000, July 3d, 474,496 livres. But what he had already supplied, without speaking of his losses, of which we will say a word farther on, already went far beyond the subvention of 3,000,000 which he received from the state.

Determined to see clearly into the intrigue which prevented the government of the United States from fulfilling the engagements of Silas Deane, Beaumarchais at last sent to America the young De Francy, with the double mission of obtaining justice from Congress for the past, and preventing for the future his cargoes from being gratuitously delivered. I will here quote two of his unpublished letters to Francy, because they exhibit him in his true aspect, as ardent in his intimate correspondence as in his official letters, and with the same variety of inclinations and instincts which has already struck us more than once.

"Paris, December 20, 1777.

"I profit, my dear Francy, by every opportunity to give you news of myself; do the same with me, I beg of you.

"Although to-day is December 20, 1777, my large vessel has not yet started; but this is rather a common accident with all merchant vessels destined for America. The minister was afraid commerce might deprive the navy of too many sailors at once, at a time when from any one moment to another it may have need of them. The most strict orders have been given in all the ports, but above all in the one where I am fitting out. It appears that the strength and size of my ship have caused Lord Stormont to make some objections, from which the minister feared he was perhaps suspected of favoring an operation which, in truth, takes place without his assistance, and even in spite of him. When ready to set sail my artillery was taken away from me, and the trouble of getting it back, or obtaining some more, is what keeps me in port. I am struggling against obstacles of every nature; but I struggle with all my might, and hope to conquer with patience, courage, and money. The enormous losses to which all this puts me appear to affect no one; the minister is inflexible; I have no one

for me: even the deputies of Passy* claim the honor of annoying me—me, the best friend of their country. On the arrival of the ‘Amphitrite,’ which landed at Lorient a small cargo of rice and indigo, they had the injustice to take possession of it, saying it was addressed to them and not to me; but, as M. de Voltaire very well says,

‘Injustice at last produces independence.’

“Probably they had looked upon my patience as weakness, and my generosity as folly. In proportion as I am attached to the interests of America, I have considered myself insulted by the rather uncivil liberties which the deputies of Passy have wished to take with me. I have written them the letter of which I send you a copy, and which they have up to this time left without an answer. In the mean while, I have had the cargo deposited with MM. Bérard frères, and in doing so, have not considered I was derogating from my frank and generous conduct toward the Congress, but only using my most lawful right over the first and very slight return for an enormous advance: this cargo is only worth 150,000 livres. You see that there is a great difference between this drop of water and the ocean of my debts.†

“As for you, my dear friend, I imagine you have arrived. I imagine you have obtained from the Congress some reasonable advance on account, and such as the situation of American affairs has permitted it to give you. I imagine that, according to my instructions, you have obtained tobaccos, and are still obtaining them every day. I imagine that my vessels will find their return cargoes ready to be embarked as soon as they arrive where you are. I further hope that, if events should have kept them longer than I imagine, you will have followed the advice of our friend Montieu, and that you will send me at least, by the ‘Flamand,’ and such other vessel as you may be able to send with it (making use of the extra guns with which Landais supplied this vessel), a cargo which will free me a little from the horrible straits I am in.

“I do not know whether I delude myself, but I believe in the good feeling and equity of the Congress as in my own and yours. Its deputies over here are not in easy circumstances, and want often renders men deficient in delicacy: that is how I explain the injustice they have endeavored to do me.‡ I do not despair even of gaining

* The American deputation, whose chief, Franklin, was residing at Passy.

† These were, in fact, the first returns that arrived in Europe in one of Beaumarchais’ vessels. Franklin and Lee, who in this matter were acting in spite of Silas Deane, did not dare to persist in their demands, and the cargo remained with Beaumarchais.

‡ This explanation may appear strange, but it is not devoid of probability, at least not at an epoch a little anterior to the one in which

them over by the calmness of my representations and the firmness of my conduct. It is very unfortunate, my friend, for this cause, that its interests in France should have been intrusted to several persons at once. One alone would have succeeded much better, and, as far as I am concerned, I owe Mr. Deane the justice to say that he is both ashamed and grieved at the conduct of his colleagues toward me, the fault of which lies altogether with Mr. Lee.

"I have also met with annoyances from the provincial Congress of South Carolina, and I am writing by L'Estargette to President Rutledge to call upon him to do justice to himself. L'Estargette, who will write to you, will inform you what success my just representations* will have had. Through all these annoyances, the news from America overwhelms me with joy. Brave, brave people! their warlike conduct justifies my esteem, and the noble enthusiasm which is felt for them in France. Finally, my friend, I only wish for some returns, then, in order to be able to serve them anew, to meet my engagements, and to be able to contract fresh ones to their advantage.†

Beaumarchais gave it, being ignorant at the time that the French government had just advanced money secretly to the American deputies. The fact is, that the latter received no more funds from the Congress than Beaumarchais received returns in kind. Silas Deane had been obliged, in the first instance, to borrow from Beaumarchais the sums necessary for his personal maintenance. Arthur Lee endeavored to make use of this fact against his colleague; but there was no mystery on this point. Far from concealing it, Beaumarchais often speaks of it in his letters to the Congress with a persistence which is perhaps not always in very good taste, but which proves at least the perfectly innocent nature of his debt, which necessity alone had forced Silas Deane to contract, as his country did not send him a sou. As for Franklin, when he landed in France he was a little richer, for he writes to his colleague, Silas Deane, from Quiberon, in December, 1776: "Our vessel brought in indigo on account of the Congress to the value of about three thousand pounds sterling, which is to be at our orders to pay our expenses." In default of bills of exchange, Congress had at all events allowed him indigo to live upon. In the course of the year 1777, the French government itself repeatedly gave money to the deputies of Passy, to the extent of two millions, which was devoted in part to the maintenance of the agents and sub-agents of America in France, and in part to the purchase of merchandise for the Congress. The employment of these millions occasioned, at a later period in Congress, discussions of a sufficiently disreputable nature.

* After having commenced with the general Congress, Beaumarchais also sent supplies to the different states, and was scarcely better paid by them.

† Here we have Beaumarchais in his true character, at once specula-

"It appears to me, if I am to believe the news, that our Frenchmen have done wonders in all the battles of Pennsylvania. It would have been very disgraceful for me, for my country, for the French name, if their conduct had not corresponded with the nobility of the cause they had espoused, with the efforts I have made to procure employment for the greater number of them; finally, for the reputation of the military corps from which they have been drawn.

"The town of London is in a fearful commotion; the ministry is on the point of death. The opposition is triumphant, and severely so. And the King of France, like a powerful eagle hovering above these events, prolongs for another moment the pleasure of seeing the two parties wavering between the fear and the hope of his decision, which is to be of so much weight in the quarrel of the two hemispheres.

"To be pedantic enough to lay down your plan of conduct for you at a distance of two thousand leagues from myself, would, my dear friend, be to imitate the folly of the English minister who wished to make war and draw up the plan of the campaign in his own closet! I profit by his lesson. Serve me as well as you can; this is your only means of rendering yourself useful to me and to yourself, and of inspiring interest to America.

"Do like myself; despise small considerations, small measures, and small resentments. I have affiliated you to a magnificent cause; you are the agent of a man who is just and generous. Remember that success is to fortune as the money due to me is to the chance of a great combination of events, but that my reputation is my own, as you are now the architect of yours. Let it always be good, my friend, and all will not be lost when every thing else is lost. I greet you as I esteem you and love you."

The following passage is a postscript, in which we see Beaumarchais applying to politics the resources of the stage, and combining ingeniously the means of evading the ministerial orders, just as he would have arranged a theatrical piece:

"This is what I think about my large vessel: I can not break the promise I have given to M. de Maurepas that my vessel should only be used for taking to St. Domingo seven or eight hundred militiamen, and that I would return without touching at any part of the Continent. However, the cargo of this vessel is of much import-

tive and enthusiastic. It can not be said that he is making a display in this case, for he is not writing officially to any person in power, but confidentially to his business agent. The words "my esteem," as well as the words "for me," in the following paragraph, are quite in his style of *naïve* self-confidence.

ance to the Congress and myself. It consists of soldiers' coats ready made, of sheets, blankets, &c. It also conveys artillery to the extent of sixty-six bronze cannons, of which four pieces carry thirty-three pounds, twenty-four pieces twenty-four pounds, twenty pieces sixteen pounds, and the rest twelve and eight pounds; besides thirty-three pieces of artillery carrying four pounds, making altogether a hundred bronze cannons, in addition to a great many other things.

"After much thinking, it has occurred to me that you might arrange secretly with the secret committee of the Congress to send immediately one or two American privateers up to St. Domingo. One of them will send his shallop to Cape Français, or will make the signal agreed upon long since for all American ships coming to the Cape, that is to say, he will *hoist a white streamer*, display the Dutch flag at the mainmast, and fire three guns; then M. Carabasse* will go on board with M. de Montaut, captain of my vessel, 'Le Fier Roderigue.' They will arrange so that on my vessel going out, the American privateer may seize it, under no matter what pretext, and take it away. My captain will protest violently, and will draw up a written statement threatening to make his complaint to the Congress. The vessel will be taken where you are. The Congress will loudly disavow the action of the brutal privateer, and will set the vessel at liberty, with polite apologies to the French flag; during this time you will land the cargo, fill the ship with tobacco, and send it back to me as quickly as possible, with all you may happen to have ready to accompany it. As M. Carmichael is very rapid, you will have time to arrange this manœuvre either with the Congress or with the captain of some privateer who is a friend of yours, and discreet. By this means M. de Maurepas finds himself liberated from his promise to those who have received it, and I from mine toward him, for no one can do any thing against violence, and my operation will meet with success in spite of all the obstacles by which my labors have been so thickly attended.

"It is on the following plan, my dear friend, that I beg you to work with effect and rapidity, for my vessel will start before the 15th of June. It will have orders to wait for news from you at Cape Français.

"From all I am doing, the Congress will no longer doubt, I hope, that the most zealous partisan of the Republic in France is your friend.

"RODERIGUE HORTALEZ & Co."

The second unpublished letter, which we also print, will give an idea of the importance of Beaumarchais' armaments. It was written at the moment when war had just broken out between France and England.

* Beaumarchais' agent at the Cape.

"Paris, December 6, 1778.

"I send on to you the privateer 'Zephyr,' to announce to you that I am ready to put to sea a fleet of more than twelve sail, at the head of which is the 'Fier Roderigue,' which you sent back to me, and which reached me at Rochefort on the first of October in good condition. This fleet can carry from five to six thousand tons, and is armed altogether like a fleet of war. Make your arrangements accordingly. If my ship the 'Ferragus,' which left Rochefort in September, has reached you, keep it to send back with my fleet. This is a joint expedition of M. de Montieu's* and my own. The cargoes have been formed in accordance with the statement which you sent me by the 'Fier Roderigue,' although, to tell the truth, I have thought more of the means of getting back my funds than of accumulating debts without cessation. The vessels will be principally laden, then, with tafia, sugar, and a little coffee. Having plenty of space for the voyage out, we took whatever freight we found; but we shall bring nothing back for any one but ourselves on our return.

"Accordingly, we send you English hardware, cloths, gauzes, ribbons, silk stuffs, nails, linen cloth, cordage, attempts at various kinds of painted cloth, paper, books, brushes, and, generally, all the articles for which you expressed a preference. Arrange so that this fleet may remain as short a time as possible in danger; for, although powerful and very well armed, the news of its position, which will reach the people where you are, must not give time to our enemies to enable them to cut off our return. First, commerce; secondly, war.

"The fleet will reach you at earliest in the course of February, being intended to make a *détour* in order to supply our colonies with flour and salt provisions, of which they have great need, and the product of which, coming back to us in bills of exchange upon our treasurers before the return of our fleet, will enable us to meet in the mean while the terrible outlay to which this expedition puts us. It is not to set sail until the first days of January.

"You will receive by the 'Fier Roderigue' all my accounts with the Congress in due form, insurance included, and *without policies being supplied*, as I have been my own insurer; and it is a thing beyond doubt, according to the decision of all European commerce, that to insure, or run the risks of insurance, gives an incontestable right to the payment of insurance money. It results simply from this, that Congress will not have any thing to pay for the cargoes it does not receive, and which may be captured on the voyage from the vessels sent from Europe. I will add to my account an exact statement of what I have received from the Congress in spite of the ungrateful deputation at Passy, which has disputed my right to each of the re-

* A shipowner of Nantes, in partnership with Beaumarchais.

turn cargoes, and which would also have taken from me that of 'La Thérèse,' if M. Pelletier, who had received the proper instructions from me, had not sold it by authority. This perpetual injustice makes me indignant, and has caused me to take an irrevocable resolution to have no further relations with the deputation as long as this rogue Lee belongs to it. The Americans must understand their business very badly to leave so suspicious, and, above all, so impolite a man at our court.* I have been promised, *mon cher*, your captain's commission. I hope to be sufficiently fortunate to send it you by the 'Fier Roderigue;' but, nevertheless, do not count on it until you have it in your hands.† You know our country; it is so great that it is always very far from the place in which a thing is promised to that in which it is given. In short, I have not had it yet, although it is promised.

"All the other details will reach you by the 'Fier.' Ah! what would you say if I enabled you on its arrival to embrace our friend Montieu on board? He is very anxious for it; but it is not yet decided.

"I have no other money for the Count de Pulaski than that which he remitted to me himself, out of which I have just paid a hundred louis for him. I will send you his account clearly made out. He was to have written to me, but I have never heard from him. I approve of what you have done for M. de Lafayette, excellent young man that he is. I am doing a service to myself when I oblige men of his disposition.‡ The advances you made to him have not yet been repaid to me; but I am in no anxiety. The same is the case with M. de la Rouërie.

"As for you, *mon cher*, I intend to write to you with my own hand as to what I mean to do for you. If you know me well, you must expect me to treat you as a friend. Your fate is henceforth attached to mine for life. I esteem you and love you, and you will not be long receiving the proofs. Recall me often to the memory and good

* As a matter of course, we no more adopt Beaumarchais' opinion with regard to Lee than that of Lee with regard to Beaumarchais.

† This was a captain's commission in the service of the colonies, which Francy had asked Beaumarchais to obtain for him, in order to improve his position in America. Francy had been a naval cadet. Beaumarchais obtained the commission he wished for, and sent it to him with the letter which follows the present one, accompanied by epaulets, which Madame de Beaumarchais made with her own hands.

‡ Lafayette was devoured by the American usurers. "He had," to use Beaumarchais' words, "found Jerusalem at Philadelphia." Francy, who had formed an intimacy with the young general, had not hesitated to lend him money belonging to his patron.

wishes of Baron de Steuben. I congratulate myself, from what he tells me, of having given so great an officer to my friends the "free men," and having in a certain way forced him to follow this noble career. I am in no way uneasy about the money I lent him to start with. Never did I make so agreeable a use of capital, for I have put a man of honor in his true place. I hear that he is the inspector-general of all the American troops! Bravo! Tell him that his glory is the interest of my money, and that I do not doubt that on those terms he will pay me with usury.

"I have received a letter from M. Deane, and one from M. Carmichael; assure them of my affectionate friendship.* They are brave generals, and will be as useful here to the cause of their country as this intriguing Lee is fatal to it. They have both flattered me that I shall have the pleasure of embracing them soon at Paris, which will not prevent me from writing to them by the 'Fier Roderigue,' very *fier* as it will be, to see itself at the head of a little squadron which will not allow its mustaches to be cut. It has promised, on the contrary, to bring me some back.†

"Farewell, my dear Francy. I am yours for life.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

CHAPTER XIX.

Relations of France with England.—Recognition of American Independence.—War between England and France.—The "Fier Roderigue" in Action.—Beaumarchais on the Treaty of 1763.—Congress and the Supplies.

IN the midst of the commercial preoccupations of Beaumarchais, and by the very effect of his armaments, the relations between France and England became worse and worse. The success of the American troops in the campaign of 1777, a success to which the author of "The Barber of Seville" could boast of having powerfully contributed, had raised the cause of the insurgents at the court of Versailles. The ministers did not give any more money to Beaumarchais, but they

* Deane had been recalled to America after the conclusion of the treaty of alliance.

† This "Fier Roderigue," the largest of Beaumarchais' vessels, was a three-decker of sixty guns. It was first of all called the "Hippopotamus." Beaumarchais rechristened it after repairing it throughout.

secretly gave millions to Franklin and Silas Deane. England, more and more irritated, arrogated the right of searching our merchant ships in full peace, of examining their cargoes, and of taking possession of all those which appeared to her suspicious. On the other side, seeing France disposed to ally herself with the Americans, she seemed at length to renounce all hope of overcoming them, and prepared to make terms with them. Secret emissaries were sent from London to the American agents in Paris, and the English spoke openly of arranging any terms with America, and afterward taking their revenge on France. Franklin and Silas Deane, while rejecting the propositions of the English agents, made use of them in treating with the French government, which it pressed to come to a decision, and to acknowledge, in fine, the independence of America. Louis XVI. and M. de Maurepas hesitated still: the king, because he did not like war; M. de Maurepas, because his great age inspired him with strong repugnance to the embarrassments that war entails. M. de Vergennes, supported by M. de Sartines, was the most resolute. In the month of August, 1777, in reply to an insidious proposition from England, asking France to sign a treaty for guaranteeing the security of the possessions of the two kingdoms in America, the minister wrote to the king this note, which to the present time has remained unpublished:

“An agreement for insuring the possessions of the two crowns in America seems equally unbecoming and useless. It would be tying our hands, and placing in the hands of our enemy a rod always raised, of which we should feel the formidable effects each time she wished to extort from us some unjust and fresh concessions.

“If condescension does not satisfy England, she ought no longer to have a choice, and it would be prudent, at all events, to give from to-day secret orders to all our commissioners at the sea-ports not to dispatch the French vessels that may be preparing to leave, under various pretexts, which may be prolonged for a fortnight, to send vessels with intelligence to Newfoundland, to the great Bank, to our islands, and to the Levant, that they may be on their guard there, and not rashly expose themselves to the uncertainty of events.”*

Beaumarchais, convinced on his side that the prolonged in-

* England, in the preceding war, had taught us to mistrust her by attacking our vessels suddenly and without a declaration of war.

decision of the government in acknowledging the independence of America might bring on peace between England and America at the expense of France, besieged M. de Maurepas and M. de Vergennes with voluminous memorials, in which he showed, with his usual petulance, the imperious alternative which it was necessary to adopt. In one of these unpublished Memorials, dated October 26, 1777, entitled "*Private Memorial for the Ministers of the King and Manifesto for the State,*" the agent for the Americans, after examining every side of the question, and proving that the system of inaction ought not to be continued, draws up, with the decision which characterizes him, a rough draft of a manifesto for the king, Louis XVI., in case he should at length decide to acknowledge the independence of the United States; and what is rather curious is, that, taking it altogether, the substance of this sketch, proposed by Beaumarchais the 26th October, 1777, is found again in the official declaration notified by the French government to the court of London the 13th March, 1778. After having drawn up his manifesto, Beaumarchais begins to set forth what measures should be taken, and discusses the opinion of each minister just as if he formed part of the council. It appears, moreover, that he only continued in writing a discussion commenced without doubt in his presence at the house of M. de Maurepas. It is not one of the least strange things of this period to see the author of "*The Barber of Seville*" deliberating in a certain way with the ministers, saying, "I should do," &c., and putting himself with naïveté in the place of the King of France.

The government did a portion of what Beaumarchais advised, and, at the same time that they notified to the court of London the recognition of American independence, they concluded secretly at Paris a treaty of alliance with the agents of the new state, and sent M. Gérard to Philadelphia, in the capacity of minister plenipotentiary, to hasten the ratification of this treaty.

The court of London, considering the recognition of the independence of the United States as a declaration of war, recalled their ambassador, and the two nations prepared for the struggle. The first shot was fired by England, June 18, 1778.

Admiral Keppel, cruising with a fleet in sight of the coasts of France, off Morlaix, encountered the frigate "*La Belle Poule*," commanded by Lieutenant Chadeau de la Clocheterie; he sent forward an English frigate to order the French officer to come to the poop of his vessel to be examined. *La Clocheterie* replied that he had no examination to undergo on the part of an English admiral. The English frigate replied by firing a cannon. *La Clocheterie* returned with his whole broadside. The action commenced between the two frigates in sight of the squadron. In a short time the English frigate was disabled. Admiral Keppel then sent two vessels against "*La Belle Poule*," which retired before superior force, and entered Brest with twenty-five men killed and fifty-seven wounded.

This first exchange of shots was received in France with shouts of enthusiasm. The utility of this war and its results for America have since been often discussed; it is certain that the English power was not so much weakened as had been anticipated by the separation of the colonies; it is not less certain that the Americans have not always shown their gratitude for the considerable sacrifices France made for them at this period; but, beyond the question of utility, there was then a question of sentiment, which was placed before every thing by a nation which had not yet been destroyed by fifty years of revolutionary crises, and the government was irresistibly drawn on by public opinion.

To the impulses of national pride, wounded by the humiliating treaty of 1763, and by the arrogance of the court of London, was added the admiration which the "insurgents" inspired. These men, seen from a distance, struggling in the name of right against might, seemed greater than ordinary men; and England, toward whom, in our alternations between fever and atony, every one turns now with looks of envy who loves order and liberty with equal ardor; England, who now fights with us against the brute force of Russia, and whose alliance is justly considered by all as the supporting point of civilization; England had then against her not only the old popular prejudice, but the aversion with which elevated minds are always filled by a policy which is unjust, egotistical, and oppressive.

Beaumarchais prepared, on his part, to carry on war and commerce at the same time. In the first place, we find him applying for sailors to the minister of marine, M. de Sartines, for the service of his large vessel.

“Paris, December 12, 1778.

“Sir,—I have the honor to request a fresh letter to M. de Marchais, without which he swears to the great gods he will not give a single man to the ‘Fier Roderigue,’ which would become soon ‘L’humble Roderigue,’ for it can only be proud through your favors; besides the order for giving me cannons, cannon balls, &c., &c., by way of compensation, in place of that hard word *ready money*, with which we are reproached, while we have our hands full of lawful claims—the clearest possible—and are asking to be paid for the advances we have made, and for our supplies to the navy.

“I can not believe, sir, that I am to be worse treated than the lowest privateersman because I am the boldest. I am going to cruise across the ocean, to convoy, attack, burn, or take private vessels, and, because I have sixty guns and 160 feet of keel, I am to be worse treated than those who can not in any way come up to us. I have too much confidence in your justice to fear it. My ‘Fier Roderigue’ is absolutely fitted out for war, and carries no cargo. While the others will be unloading and loading, he will cruise fearlessly, and sweep the American seas. This, sir, is his true destination. See yourself whether your wise order is less applicable to it than to all the projected frigates which are yet in the wilds of the imagination, while the ‘Fier Roderigue’ is ready to plow the Atlantic as soon as you will permit him to have sailors.

“If I presented myself before you to-day, and had the honor to propose to you to construct and fit out a vessel of this importance, always fit to take the place of a king’s ship wherever I sent it, do you think, sir, you would refuse it guns, and the title of captain for its commander? Such feeble encouragements for such great objects would be nothing in your eyes. How, then, can it be less valuable to you, being already built, than if it had to be constructed?

“I ask your pardon, but the multiplicity of the affairs which occupy you may have prevented your seeing the importance of my armament, which is destined for the triple object of encouraging the commerce of France by my example and my success, supplying provisions openly or secretly to the islands which have the greatest want of them, and conducting to the continent of America, during the most stormy times, a French merchant fleet sufficiently important for the United States to judge by this effort of the great desire France has to support our new ties of commerce with them.

“I present these grave objects to your wise consideration; there

are none, I venture to say, more worthy of the protection of so enlightened a minister.

"Accept, sir, &c.,

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The "*Fier Roderigue*" sailed, then, with its sixty guns, conveying ten merchant vessels. Off the island of Grenada it met the fleet of Admiral d'Estaing, who was preparing to give battle to that of the English Admiral Biron. On seeing this fine vessel of war pass at a distance, strutting before the wind, he signaled to it to come up; learning that it belonged to his majesty, Caron de Beaumarchais, he said it would be a pity not to take advantage of it, and, considering the urgency of the case, assigned it its post in the battle without asking for the authorization of its proprietor, leaving to the mercy of the waves and the English the unfortunate merchant vessels which this war-ship protected. The "*Fier Roderigue*" resigned himself bravely to his fate, took a glorious share in the battle of Grenada, and contributed in forcing Admiral Biron to retreat; but the captain was killed, and the ship riddled with balls. The very evening of the fight, Count d'Estaing, feeling the necessity of consoling Beaumarchais, wrote to him from on board the admiral's ship, and sent him, through the minister of marine, the following unpublished letter, which it is not usual to meet with in the archives of a dramatic author:

"On board the '*Languedoc*,' Roadstead of St. George, }
"Isle of Grenada, July 12, 1779.

"I have only time, sir, to write to you that '*Le Fier Roderigue*' has acted well in line, and contributed to the success of the king's arms. You will pardon me the more for having employed the ship so well, as your interests will not suffer—be certain of that. The brave M. de Montaut* has unfortunately been killed. I shall address immediately to the minister the claims to rewards, and I hope you will assist me in soliciting those your navy has so justly merited.

"I have the honor to be, with all the sentiments you know so well how to inspire, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

"ESTAING."

The minister of marine hastened to send this letter to Beaumarchais, who replied as follows to the minister:

"Paris, September 7, 1776.

"Sir,—I return you thanks for having sent me the letter from

* He was the captain of the "*Fier Roderigue*."

Count d'Estaing. It is very noble in him, in the moment of his triumph, to have thought that a word from his hand would be agreeable to me. I take the liberty of sending you a copy of his short letter, of which, like a good Frenchman as I am, I am proud, and at which I rejoice as a passionate lover of my country against proud England.

"The brave Montaut thought he could not do better to prove that he was not unworthy of the post with which he was honored than by losing his life; whatever may be the consequence to my affairs, my poor friend Montaut has died on the bed of honor, and I feel a childish joy at being certain that those English, who have so cut me up in their papers for four years, will read therein that one of my vessels has contributed to take from them the most fertile of their possessions.

"And the enemies of M. d'Estaing, and yours especially, sir, I see them biting their nails, and my heart leaps with joy. You know my tender and respectful devotion. BEAUMARCHAIS."

However, the joy of the patriot was somewhat toned down by the anguish of the merchant. The report of the second in command of the "Fier Roderigue," who had taken the command after the death of his chief, arrived at the same time as the letter of Admiral d'Estaing. This report was also very satisfactory as regarded Beaumarchais' glory, but it was very unsatisfactory as regarded his coffers. Under these circumstances, the shipowner wrote to the King the following letter:

"September 11, 1779.

"Sire,—I am not going to ask you for the reward of my labors; your wise ministers know that my chief happiness would be that they should all be useful to your majesty.

"I do not ask you for what the cruise of the 'Fier Roderigue' has cost, feeling too much honored that a vessel of mine should have merited the praise of the admiral by fighting in line with a victorious squadron.

"But, sire, war is a game of kings, which crushes individuals, and scatters them like the dust. The 'Fier Roderigue' was convoying ten other ships, which were destined for commercial operations equally useful to the state in another form.

"The death of my first captain, thirty-five men unable to serve, the destruction of my vessel, the worst used of the squadron (having had three shots in the side, four in the water-line, two of which went completely through; five in the masts, which damaged them much; one in the large pump, which split it to pieces; forty in the sails, which have riddled them; and the remainder in the cordage, which have cut it to atoms); the entire removal of sailors from where my

other vessels were put on their arrival at Port Royal in order to complete the crews of the squadron; the order given to the 'Fier Roderigue' to repair and follow the squadron; the necessity I am under of sending fresh instructions to the new commander of my fleet, and the impossibility for more than three months of this merchant fleet, which has already lost eleven of its number, sailing under convoy of the 'Fier Roderigue' for its true destination: all this, sire, ruining my cruise, my advances for which have been enormous, and postponing the returns which should now have arrived, force me to implore the assistance of your majesty.

"Let me not perish, sire, and I am satisfied. The service that I ask is of slight importance.

"They inform me at Grenada that they will draw upon me at sight for 90,000 livres, for the necessary repairs of the 'Fier Roderigue.'

"Out of upward of two millions that I have advanced this year to my fleet, there only remains to be paid a hundred thousand crowns, half the 25th of this month, and half the 10th of October. I supplicate your majesty to have the goodness to order that this small sum of 400,000 livres may be lent me from the royal treasury for some months only. M. le Comte de Maurepas knows by the experience of his own kindness to me that I am faithful to my engagements.

"On the arrival of considerable funds which I expect from Martinique, where my supplies have been sold, I will repay to the treasury both capital and interest.

"It will not be until after a calculation, impossible now, which will place before the minister my real losses, that I shall invoke the justice of your majesty for their reimbursement; but it is in the light of a favor that I ask for the present loan of 400,000 livres, which the havoc in this cruise renders indispensable to prevent the destruction of one of the most faithful of your majesty's subjects, whose ruin would bring on a general discouragement.*

"CARON DU BEAUMARCHAIS."

At the same time, Beaumarchais got his second in command

* Beaumarchais received this advance of 400,000 livres as an installment upon an indemnity of a more considerable amount, of which the figure had yet to be decided. It was fixed by three *fermiers-généraux* appointed by the minister. The ten vessels convoyed by the "Fier Roderigue" had been dispersed, and the greater part of them taken by the English, so that the losses of Beaumarchais in this voyage were enormous, and, after many discussions, the indemnity was fixed at two millions, payable in several installments, which he received in succession, and the last of which was paid him, as we shall see, on his leaving the prison of Saint-Lazare.

decorated with the cross of St. Louis, and procured the admission into the military marine of one of his officers, who was afterward an admiral.

Soon afterward the Count d'Estaing, who had given such a glorious account of the vessel belonging to the author of "The Barber," returned to France. Beaumarchais hastened to present his respects to him; the admiral was absent, and to excuse his absence wrote to the owner of the "Fier Roderigue" this facetious letter:

"For a vice-admiral who is perhaps out of favor, having taken too much upon himself, having used, *abused even the naval forces*, of M. de Beaumarchais, not to receive the visit of his *sovereign*, is what was never heard of; it is much against my will that it has been so. The excessive kindness with which the aquatic Jeannot had been honored the evening before by a number of unexpected visits had made him close his door, without foreseeing one which would have caused him so much pleasure.

"M. d'Estaing begs M. de Beaumarchais to receive his excuses and his regrets; they are the greater from the fact that he is obliged to go limping about Versailles for some days. The surgeons assure him that, in virtue of staircases and bows, he will come back disabled for at least three weeks. If it be not so, he will request a meeting at Paris; otherwise he will try to procure, by means of a letter, a visit which is of so much interest to him.

"Passy, December 26, 1779."

To this Beaumarchais replied immediately in the same tone:

"December 27, 1779.

"Very worthy and much respected admiral, who may be attacked, but can never be out of favor—as you have only made use of the navy belonging to me, a sovereign, in the service of another who is equally powerful and just—let us hope he will do justice to us both in loading you with honors and in repairing my losses.

"You shall receive, whenever you please, homage from me, a sovereign and your servant, who did not wait for your great exploits to appreciate you, and who have fought a hundred times with my tongue against the army of scoundrels who were speaking ill of you, while you were using your sword so nobly against the enemies of the state. The first thing necessary is to re-establish your health, of which we have great need; and if by chance you have formed the project of writing an explanation of your warlike conduct, as people seek to insinuate, I entreat you to reject this idea with the sign of the cross as a temptation of the devil's. I conjure you to do so, and do

so in the name of all who honor you, and especially in that of a celebrated old man who loves you, and who burns to see you seated by his side, with a baton in your hand, at the great tribunal of honor, of which you so gloriously fulfill the duties.*

"I take the liberty, in order that you may keep away spleen, of forwarding to you my last political production, which has not had the good luck of pleasing every body. When you can grant me a quarter of an hour, you may be quite sure of overwhelming with joy him who is, with the most respectful devotion, at the end as at the beginning, and during the whole course of his life, worthy and respected admiral,

"Your very humble servant,

BEAUMARCHAIS."

The little work which Beaumarchais sent to the Admiral d'Estaing to "keep away spleen" was a very serious one, which was about to procure him both glory and renown. While exchanging cannon shots, England and France also exchanged manifestoes. The court of London had employed the pen of the historian Gibbon to announce to the whole world the perfidy of the cabinet of Versailles. Forgetting its own history, which was full of diplomatic artifices of the same description, and much graver ones, the English government exaggerated and misrepresented the very small part that the court of France had taken in sending supplies to the Americans before the rupture between the two governments. Beaumarchais, who had just figured in the struggle with his cannon shots, thought he ought to interfere in it with his pen. He was in some measure authorized in doing so, for the justificatory address from the court of London, while reproaching the French minister with having protected a commercial company directed by Beaumarchais, attacked the latter personally in a very warm manner. In asking the minister permission to reply in his own name, Beaumarchais wrote, "If it will be without importance as coming from a private person, it will not, perhaps, be without force as coming from a person who has been insulted." He obtained this permission, and in December, 1779, published, under the title of "Observations upon the Justificatory Address from the Court of London," a pam-

* This, no doubt, refers to M. de Maurepas, who wished Admiral d'Estaing to be silent in reference to the criticisms of which his cruise had been the subject.

phlet, which has been inserted in the collection of his works, and of which, consequently, we will speak but little. This pamphlet, written with his characteristic *verve*, which, with some negligences of style, is always animated, made a rather great sensation. He placed, in his turn, in the strongest light, all the ancient perfidiousness of the English government—all the annoyances to which it had subjected our commerce for three years, the patience with which the French court had borne them, and even how it had contributed to them more than once to please Lord Stormont. Unfortunately, the author, drawn on by the vivacity of his pen, had committed a serious error: in dwelling upon the humiliating conditions of the treaty imposed by England in 1763, after the seven years' war, he had accepted, without verification, a very widely-spread opinion that there existed in this treaty a secret article, by which France shamefully granted to England the right *to limit the number of her vessels*; and, under the impression of this fact, which Beaumarchais believed true, he wrote the following lines: "My courage revived when I thought that my country would be avenged for the degradation to which its enemy had subjected her in fixing, by the treaty of 1763, the small number of vessels which it condescended still to allow her."

On reading this phrase, the Duke de Choiseul and all the old ministers of Louis XV. who had signed the fatal treaty of 1763, and who felt themselves already sufficiently humiliated by the actual clauses of this treaty, eagerly had recourse to the king, invoking justice against a writer who sought to dishonor them; they demanded that the pamphlet of Beaumarchais should be suppressed by an order in council as false and calumnious. The assertion of Beaumarchais had been made in good faith—it had even been published before by French and English writers. He proposed a correction of the statement; the Duke de Choiseul insisted upon a suppression in due form. The council of ministers met, and it was under these circumstances that the author of the pamphlet addressed to all the assembled ministers an unpublished letter, which appears to me sufficiently original in tone to deserve reproduction:

"December 19, 1779.

"My Lords,—If a warrior who fights for his country ought not to receive from it a degrading blow, because the inequality of the ground may have made him stumble an instant, is it justice of the king to class among the list of scandalous libelers, whose works are suppressed by decrees, a writer who repels with force and dignity the foul imputations of the enemies of his country, because he has fallen, with a hundred thousand others, into an involuntary error, which it would be easy, and even advantageous, to correct with dignity?

"When a man who has aspired only to the honor of being in the right, does not blush to own his error publicly, and to extract from it a great advantage for the cause which he is defending, what inconvenience is there in letting him correct himself?

"What can have a better effect in counteracting a doubtful assertion than the free and plain disavowal of it by its author, when he can spread that as rapidly as the original work?

"And ought you to reserve for zeal, industry, and patriotism, the dishonor of suppression, intended to punish the voluntary misdeeds of rotten culprits and impenitent sinners?

"Before treating me with this cruelty, I implore the king's ministers to read what I am sending to the 'Courier de l'Europe' and to the 'Nord.' The same thing, in substance, will be put at the same time in all the public papers, with a promise to those who will remit to me the faulty copy, to give them in place two corrected ones.

"I entreat them also to consider that to throw discredit on such a production by the stigma of a seizure is to take from it all that it contains of good and praiseworthy, and to give to the reproach of perfidy, contained in the English manifesto, the greatest force, by the disavowal of the principal points in the answer.

"From the grief which I feel beforehand, I feel that I can not support the odious effect of such a thing. My head is leaving me, and I have passed a most dreadful night.

"I have received this instant from a relation of M. de Choiseul's a copy annotated on the margin in his own hand, and with these words at page 35: '*This fact is false and absurd.*' These are exactly the terms in your proposed arrêt. It is he, then, who has dictated them!

"*False!* the expression is just, since the fact is not true; but *absurd!* After Dunkerque and its English commissioner, dare they, without lowering their eyes, characterize as absurd any naval fact which concerns us, however hard it may be?

"To destroy a port of France at ten leagues from the enemy by their order, and to keep it in ruins under the shameful inspection of their commissioner, is truly *absurd*. Yet this has been the case for the last hundred years beneath the eyes of an indignant country.

"I speak to French hearts; I ought to be heard. Ah! leave me, my lords, leave me, I conjure you, to retrieve my error. I can do it, honorably, and with advantage; but I feel sure, from what I suffer, that I shall die of grief if you have the cruelty to deliver my person and my work to the degradation of a public stigma.

"It will only remain for my friends to print the twelve or fifteen hundred flattering letters that I have received during the last six days, in which the hearts of good citizens are plainly shown in the vivacity of their thanks:

"In which one says, 'I shall put this production in a separate case, with Tacitus, the Cardinal de Retz, Price, and Sidney, for no monument so noble, so worthy of the nation, will honor present events.'

"In which another writes, 'The author is intoxicated with patriotism; his pen sparkles. It is, then, true that man only does grand things when he is animated by noble passions.'

"In which a third owns 'that he had never understood the question well, and that, till I wrote, every body said France was wrong, but that now opinions are settled.'

"In which all the writers thank me for my zeal and courage, in a country where so few people are to show it, for the glory of France. These letters of my fellow-citizens would show that such a waywardness is attached to my fate that I can never undertake any good without its bringing me harm. He has wished, they will say, to work, to arm his country—they have stopped his expeditions; he has wished to write, to defend the honor of France—they have suppressed his works. His nation esteemed him, and authority crushed him. He had no choice, then, but to die or flee. From mercy, from humanity, if I can not obtain it by justice, do not break my heart by a suppression, while you tolerate a Linguet. He has insulted you all, I have respected you all; he has made an attack upon you, I have only made *observations*. What a difference in the work and in the reward!

"If this horrible order is hurled at me, I shall look upon myself as a limb cut off, dead, and no longer belonging to any thing; and will owe nothing more to France but extreme unction or a passport.

"I ask pardon, but I am in despair.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The passage which had wounded the Duke de Choiseul was suppressed, but without any remark that could be mortifying to Beaumarchais, whose pamphlet reappeared with this corrected passage, which still told severely against the signers of the treaty of 1763: "My courage revives when I think that my country will be avenged for the degradation to which

it was subjected by the treaty of 1763 ; *that the dark veil, the funeral crape with which our port of Dunkerque has been enveloped these sixty years will at length be rent.*"

Meanwhile Beaumarchais, whether warring with the cannon or with the pen, had still to wait for payment for his supplies. During two years and a half the Congress had determined to consider him as a man who was too happy to send to them gratuitously. It had only replied to his claims by the most disdainful silence, when on a lucky day he received the following letter, which, taken in connection with the celebrated letter of Admiral d'Estaing, which we have previously cited, adds another strange incident to his career.

*"By express Order of the Congress sitting at Philadelphia, to
M. de Beaumarchais.*

"Sir,—The Congress of the United States of America, grateful for the great efforts you have made in their favor, presents you its thanks and the assurance of its esteem. *It grieves for the misfortunes you have suffered in support of its States.* Unfortunate circumstances have prevented the accomplishment of its desires ; but it will take the promptest measures for acquitting itself of the debts it has contracted with you.

"The generous sentiments and the exalted views which alone could dictate a conduct such as yours, are your greatest eulogium, and are an honor to your character. While, by your great talents, you have rendered yourself useful to your prince, you have gained the esteem of this rising republic, and merited the deserved applause of the New World.

JOHN JAY, President."

After two years and a half spent in the service of America, Beaumarchais found the Congress at last giving him some sign of its existence. This missive promised much : we shall show presently what it produced ; but we must first explain how the Congress had been led to bestow upon the author of "The Barber of Seville" the applause of the New World as an installment toward the payment of his supplies.

CHAPTER XX.

The American Commissioners.—Bills at a long Date.—Prolonged Delays.—Beaumarchais' first Million.—Arbitration proposed.—Beaumarchais in Distress.—Repudiation persisted in.—Ultimate Compromise.

THE treaty of alliance between France and the United States had been signed the 6th February, 1778, at Versailles; and, a short time after, Silas Deane, who was the first of the three American commissioners to arrive at Paris, and who had treated with Beaumarchais in the name of the Congress, was recalled to Philadelphia to render an account of his conduct, and to defend the engagements he had made from the imputations of his colleague, Arthur Lee. It is known that the latter had accused him of having, by a fraudulent agreement with Beaumarchais, and contrary to the intentions of the French government, transformed a gratuitous gift into a commercial operation. As this assertion, of which we have already shown the falsity, offered the advantage to America of dispensing with all gratitude and all payment to Beaumarchais, Congress was naturally somewhat disposed to adopt it. Silas Deane, who, on arriving in the United States, found an unfavorable impression against him, had to sustain a violent dispute with two brothers of Arthur Lee, who exercised considerable influence with Congress. Debates arose of a somewhat unedifying character, not only about the engagements contracted with Beaumarchais, but about the employment of the funds supplied directly to the American agents by the court of France. Meanwhile Silas Deane possessed the most honorable testimonials from the French government; the king, Louis XVI., had given him his portrait; M. de Vergennes had written the most flattering letters in his favor, and the late chief clerk of M. de Vergennes, M. Gérard, who arrived at the same time in Philadelphia as minister plenipotentiary from the court of France, testified the greatest esteem for him. M. Gérard had been instructed to interfere, but with great pru-

dence, in any disputes; but, seeing that this one was increasing to such an extent as to become a contest between the French influence and the English party, represented in the heart of the Congress by the brothers Lee, he energetically undertook the offensive against the latter. "The stories of Mr. Arthur Lee," he wrote to M. de Vergennes, "are but an absurd tissue of falsehoods and sarcasms, which can only compromise those who have the misfortune of being obliged to have any correspondence with him. Permit me, Monseigneur, to congratulate myself at least on having relieved you of this burden."* In another dispatch M. Gérard wrote to the minister, "I explained myself gradually, and not until the very instant when it was indispensable, to prevent this dangerous and bad man (Arthur Lee) from replacing Franklin,† and being, at the same time, charged with the negotiations with Spain. I can not conceal from you, Monseigneur, that I rejoice every day more and more at having been able to assist in preventing this misfortune."

As to the accusations directed against Silas Deane, M. Gérard attributed them to the "spirit of ostracism, which," said he, "has already begun to exercise its influence against men who have rendered important services, when they have ceased to be necessary." Notwithstanding the support of M. Gérard, Silas Deane obtained indeed but half a victory. He was cleared from every accusation, and they allowed him for his personal expenses £500 a year for the time his mission in France had lasted; but no mention was made of his services. They decided that he should return to Europe to arrange all his affairs, but without any official title. "It is an ostracism," M. Gérard wrote again to M. de Vergennes, "it is an ostracism of the most cruel and deliberate character. They do not think of answering the letters you have written in his favor."

* After this quarrel, it was indeed decided that Arthur Lee, in his turn, should be recalled.

† Arthur Lee exerted all his strength to have Franklin also recalled, that he might remain the sole representative of the United States at the court of France, but the French government, which mistrusted him, opposed this, and requested that Franklin might remain, and he alone was retained.

On his side, Silas Deane wrote to Beaumarchais: "I have been treated in a manner which neither you, my friends, nor even my enemies expected. However, I do not doubt that America will end by becoming more just toward you and toward me."* The Congress, indeed, began not to have so much confidence in the reports of Arthur Lee. It moreover was divided between its desire not to pay for the old supplies and its wish to receive fresh ones. Accordingly, Beaumarchais' agent, Francy, declared that his patron would not send any thing more unless they acknowledged his previous claims, and guaranteed him, by a formal contract, from all difficulty for the future. The contract which was to satisfy this last condition had been signed the 6th April, 1778, by the members of the committee of commerce and Francy, acting in the name of Beaumarchais. Only the Congress, always distrustful, ordered that the contract should be sent to Paris, and should not be ratified until after the American deputation had obtained from the Minister of Foreign Affairs a categorical answer to the question whether Beaumarchais was really the creditor of the Congress for cargoes to the amount of five millions already sent, or whether these cargoes were, as Arthur Lee had not ceased to affirm, a gratuitous gift on the part of the French government. A note to this effect was presented to M. de Vergennes the 10th September, 1778, by the three commissioners, Franklin, Arthur Lee, who was not yet recalled, and John Adams, who had been lately sent to Paris to replace Silas Deane. Here is the answer of the minister; it is addressed to M. Gérard, the representative of France in the United States, who was commissioned to transmit it to the Congress.

"The Commissioners of the Congress have just addressed to me an official letter, which refers to two objects: the first relates to the correctness of the account of M. de Beaumarchais, under the name of the firm 'Roderigue Hortalez & Company;' the second to the ratification of the contract, which the Congress, or rather the Com-

* See Appendix for a letter addressed to Beaumarchais by M. Carmichael, who was afterward minister of the United States at the court of Spain. This letter proves the friendship of Carmichael for Beaumarchais, and his conviction of the ingratitude of Congress toward him.

mittee of Commerce in its name, has signed with Monsieur Thévenau de Francy, agent of Monsieur Caron de Beaumarchais. M. Franklin and his colleagues desire to know the articles that have been supplied to them by the king, and those that M. de Beaumarchais has supplied them with on his own account; and they insinuate that the Congress is convinced that all, or at least the greater part of what has been sent, is on account of his majesty. I have replied to them that the king did not furnish them with any thing; that he simply allowed M. de Beaumarchais to supply himself from his arsenals, under an engagement to replace what he took; and, moreover, that I would with pleasure interest myself to prevent their being too much pressed for the repayment of the military articles."

As to what related to the fresh contract signed between Beaumarchais and the Congress, the minister added that he had no advice to give as to the ratification of this agreement, not being called on to answer for the engagements of the house of Roderigue Hortalez & Co. In this answer of M. de Vergennes', which was very explicit concerning the rights of Beaumarchais as creditor of the Congress, there were two points: there was a suppression dictated by policy, and which consisted in passing over in silence the pecuniary aid granted to Beaumarchais before the rupture between France and England; and, at the same time, the truth which was allowed to appear in the minister's last sentence in reference to the military articles supplied. This sentence proves that, if Beaumarchais had received pecuniary aid, he had not had it to enable him to send gratuitously, but to send on credit, leaving to the debtors rather a considerable latitude, especially as to the munitions of war. Besides, it is evident that Beaumarchais conformed to ministerial instructions; for during two years, excepting two cargoes of 150,000 francs each, of which he had been obliged to take possession by authority, he had not been able to obtain a liard for five millions of military and other stores, and when he applied for payment on account, the Americans replied to him by denying the debt, or did not reply at all.

In presence of the formal declaration of the minister, reproduced and corroborated in a note addressed to the Congress by M. Gérard, in which it was said that "the French government has nothing to do with the commercial operations of

Beaumarchais," it was necessary that Congress should at last make up its mind to acknowledge the author of "The Barber of Seville" as a genuine creditor. It was not until then that they sent him the flattering address we have quoted in the preceding chapter. On reading these words, "The Congress grieves for the misfortunes you have suffered in support of its States; it will take the promptest measures for acquitting itself of the debt it has contracted with you," Beaumarchais thought himself, at last, on the eve of receiving either money or tobacco: this was another illusion. Instead of giving him an installment, at least in kind, the Congress, alleging the bad state of its finances and the *dangers of navigation* as pretexts, preferred sending him, in October, 1779, on his general account, 2,544,000 livres in bills of exchange at three years' date, drawn on Franklin. It is certain that Congress used freely the privilege M. de Vergennes had conferred on it, of taking its time with Beaumarchais, when, upon a debt of five millions of three years' date, it sent an installment in bills of exchange payable in three years more—bills which were signed by a nation hardly acknowledged as such, and which consequently could scarcely pass for ready money.

Notwithstanding the pompous thanks of the Congress, its conduct exhibited an afterthought; it persisted in reality in not believing seriously in Beaumarchais' debt, and it did not despair of finding some means of getting rid of it. We are quite astonished, two years later, to find the minister of finance, Robert Morris, speaking to Franklin of a plan for not paying these bills, and Franklin proving to him that his scheme is impracticable, because the bills are at the time in circulation. We are not less astonished when we find Franklin—in answer to a question addressed to him by the head of the financial department of foreign affairs, M. Durival, in reference to a settlement for the many millions which his country had received from France, and of which we will speak hereafter—return to a question which appeared decided, and three years after the declaration by M. de Vergennes, two years after the letter from the Congress and the issue of the bills of exchange, ask the minister again, the 15th of May, 1781, if the things claimed by Beaumarchais were not gifts from the King of France.

M. Durival answered him very laconically on this subject: "As to the articles furnished and advanced by M. de Beaumarchais, the minister has no knowledge of them."

In the mean while, Beaumarchais, discontented at being so badly paid by the general Congress, had endeavored to treat with the separate States of America. He was not more fortunate. Two cargoes sold by him—one to the State of Virginia, the other to the State of South Carolina—had been paid for in paper money, and this paper, before he could get rid of it, had suffered an enormous depreciation. All this was not encouraging; accordingly, in the year 1780, he on his part refused to ratify the treaty concluded in his name with the Congress by Francy. Making as much as possible out of the bills of exchange at three years' date, he speculated no more with the constituted bodies, and confined himself to waiting till the Congress came to a final settlement about his general account.

In 1781, Silas Deane returned to France to examine all the accounts he had left unsettled; that of Beaumarchais was fixed by him, April 6, at a sum of 3,600,000 livres, after the deduction of the payments made on account, and including the interest from the reception of the first supplies.

Armed with this claim, Beaumarchais demanded payment from the Congress. No answer came during two years. In 1783, a new agent from the United States, Mr. Barclay, arrived in Paris, with the title of consul-general, and a mission to revise the accounts audited by Silas Deane. Beaumarchais refused to submit his account, which had been already verified, to a fresh examination. Mr. Barclay declared to him that the Congress would neither hear nor pay any thing unless his account was again gone over and investigated. After resisting for a year, Beaumarchais yielded. The account was revised and reduced in amount by Mr. Barclay, but the American government persisted in not paying any thing; and soon an incident, which occurred without the knowledge of Beaumarchais, determined the Congress to adjourn his debt indefinitely. This incident was as follows.

The United States having already received a great deal of money from the French government, and requesting, in 1783, a new loan of six millions, it was agreed that, on receiving

these six millions, they should determine their financial position with France by an exact recapitulation in the contract of all the sums they had already received, whether as loans or gifts. In the first class, under the head of sums lent successively, eighteen millions were put down to begin with ; then came a loan of ten millions from Holland, guaranteed by the King of France, and of which he paid the interest ; finally, the six millions of the last loan. All this made a sum of *thirty-four millions*, which the United States engaged to repay at different times, and which, by the way, was not paid very exactly at the proper periods. At length the generosity of the king caused the insertion in the contract of a second category of sums, which he declared he made a present of to the United States. This list consisted, first, of three millions *granted*, the contract said, previously to the treaty of alliance of February, 1778 ; secondly, of six millions given in 1781. Here, then, were nine millions which the King of France, independently of sums lent and of enormous sums spent in the American war, declared he gave up gratuitously. Now, by a rather strange oversight, Franklin, who had signed this contract the 25th February, 1783, did not perceive till three years later, in 1786, when he had already returned to America, that there was an explanation to be asked for respecting the three millions indicated as having been *given* previously to 1778. He had received from the government but two millions, but he had received in 1777 a million more from the *fermiers-généraux*, for which million the United States had paid an installment in tobacco to the value of 153,229 livres. "It is possible," wrote Franklin to the banker of the United States at Paris, "that this million, furnished ostensibly by the *fermiers-généraux*, may have been, in reality, a gift from the crown ; but in this case, as Mr. Thompson observes, the *fermiers-généraux* owe us the two cargoes of tobacco which they received on account of that sum." There is some *naïveté* in Franklin omitting to add that, if the million in question was not the one given by the *fermiers-généraux*, the United States must have owed them for nine years the difference between the million received in 1777 and the 153,229 livres paid in tobacco. It must be said that the United States, a young and poor nation, were suffi-

ciently accustomed to receive from all hands, and more disposed to accept than to return.* The banker of the United States, M. Grand, was commissioned then to ascertain from M. de Vergennes if, among the three millions which the king said he had granted gratuitously to the United States, was included the million from the *fermiers-généraux*. M. Durival answered, in the name of M. de Vergennes, that the king had nothing to do with the advance made by the *fermiers-généraux*, but that the sum in question was a *million delivered from the royal treasury, June 10, 1776*. It was precisely the million given secretly to Beaumarchais. Now what had been the idea of the government in inserting in the contract of February 25, 1783, any mention of this million, after the eight millions given directly to the American agents? Was it a simple recapitulation of the money disbursed gratuitously in the service of the United States—a recapitulation made in order to facilitate the regulation of the accounts of the treasury, without any thought being given to the inconvenient effects it might have upon Beaumarchais? If this last supposition were the true one, it must be acknowledged that Beaumarchais, in claiming full payment for all his cargoes, and accounting for the money afterward, would have acted contrarily to the views of the government which had supplied him with funds; but what took place after M. Durival's answer gives us a right to affirm more than ever that the government, in making the advance, did not mean that Beaumarchais should be accountable for the million to the United States.

Indeed, after reading the letter from M. Durival, which stated that this million was given June 10, 1776, without any farther detail, the banker of the United States, M. Grand, wrote to obtain the receipt, and the name of the person who had received the million. The chief of the office of funds consulted M. de Vergennes, and replied at first by a refusal. The bank-

* Our chargé d'affaires at Philadelphia, M. de Marbois, writes to M. de Vergennes, August 24, 1784: "I have reason to think that the avarice of M. M. (the Minister of Finance of the United States) may render him capable of very reprehensible irregularities, and that he will never take much trouble about fulfilling the obligations of the United States."

er insisted afresh, alleging his own responsibility. M. Durival then addressed to the minister a secret report as to the question whether it was desirable to supply M. Grand with the copy he asked for of M. de Beaumarchais' receipt. After having stated that, according to the receipt, M. de Beaumarchais was to render an account to M. de Vergennes only, the chief of the bureau of funds concluded thus: "There might be an objection to furnishing a weapon against M. de Beaumarchais by showing to M. Grand the copy he asks for, of the acknowledgment for the million delivered June 10, 1776." In the margin of the report there is written: "Referred, September 5, 1786;" and below, in the margin also, is found the decision of M. de Vergennes thus expressed: "There can be no reason for giving the acknowledgment mentioned in this report." Conformably to this decision of the minister's, the chief of the bureau of funds replied to the banker of the United States by the following letter:

"Versailles, September 16, 1786.

"The minister persists, sir, in his opinion that the receipt which you ask for has nothing in common with the affairs with which you are charged, and that it would be useless in the new point of view in which you look at it. It is very easy for you, sir, to prove that the sum in question has not been paid into your hands, since you did not begin to be intrusted with the affairs of the Congress until January, 1777, while the receipt in question is dated June 10, 1776.

"I have the honor to be, &c., DURIVAL."

By this refusal of the minister the Congress believed itself sufficiently authorized to conclude, first, that it was Beaumarchais who had received this million; secondly, that this million ought to be restored by him to the Congress; thirdly, that the Congress ought not to pay any thing until this mystery was cleared up. All these conclusions were not equally just, for there was no question here, as in the declaration of the minister in 1778, of a concealment dictated by policy; the French government no longer concealed the fact, in 1786, that it had assisted the insurgent colonies before their rupture with England, for it declared formally that it had given three millions with that view before the treaty of 1778, and went even so far as to fix the date of the first million delivered June 10, 1776. If it refused to unveil to the United States the

name of the man to whom it had advanced this million, it was no longer from considerations of political prudence, but from a motive of personal equity toward Beaumarchais "not to furnish the Americans with a weapon against him," as M. Durival plainly stated in his report to the minister. By this refusal to communicate to the United States Beaumarchais' receipt, the minister said to them explicitly, "I have classed this first million in the contract of February 25, 1783, among the millions given gratuitously by me for your service, because it was, in fact, given by me; but as it has not been given to you, as the man to whom I gave it has bound himself by his receipt to render an account of its employment to me and not to you, this man can be accountable to me alone. If I asked you for the repayment of this million, you would, on your part, have the right to claim it from the person who received it; but as I ask you for nothing, it is for me only to decide how far this gratuitous advance of a million made by me on your behalf is to be serviceable to you, or to the man to whom I made it, in order to forward a secret operation which has been very serviceable to you, but which hitherto, from your refusal to pay, and from the various losses he has suffered in his trade with you, appears to have been more injurious than profitable to him."

This suppression in favor of Beaumarchais was the more justifiable from the fact that the incident took place completely without his knowledge; that he had not been called on to substantiate his rights or interests, either upon mention being made in the contract of February 25, 1783, of the million received by him—a secret contract which he did not know of—nor upon the question of the receipt which was applied for by the banker of the United States in 1786, and refused by the minister.*

* To the preceding it must further be added that, whatever motive may have determined M. de Vergennes to speak, in the contract of February 25, 1783, of the first million given secretly to Beaumarchais, the minister had certainly no intention of making him responsible toward the United States for what he had received in order to assist them; for in the contract of February 25, M. de Vergennes does not say a word either of the second million given by Spain, or of the third million given by installments to Beaumarchais in 1777.

While these explanations were being exchanged between M. de Vergennes and the banker of the United States, Beaumarchais urged in vain upon the Congress the liquidation of his account, which had been deferred nine years, asking at least for an arbitration, proposing as one of his arbitrators M. de Vergennes himself, and accepting on the part of the Americans any arbitrators they chose to appoint, with the exception of his personal enemy, Arthur Lee.

In 1787, his patience being exhausted, he wrote to the President of the Congress, under date of June 12, an unpublished letter, from which I extract the following passage :

“What do you expect, sir, is to be thought here of the vicious circle in which, it appears, I am to be inclosed? We will not make any payment to M. de Beaumarchais before we have arranged his accounts, and we will not arrange his accounts that we may not have any payment to make him! A people who have become powerful and independent may well, it will be said, look upon gratitude as the virtue of an individual, and quite beneath its policy; but nothing can liberate a state from being just, and, above all, from paying its debts. I dare hope, sir, that, touched by the importance of the affair, and by the force of my reasons, you will do me the favor of honoring me with an official answer as to the course which the honorable Congress will determine upon—whether to verify my account quickly, and pay on that verification like any just sovereign, or at length to appoint arbitrators in Europe to decide the points in debate as to assurance and commission, as Mr. Barclay had the honor to propose to you himself in 1785; or, finally, to write to me, without equivocation, that the sovereigns of America, forgetting my past services, refuse me all justice. Then I will adopt the course most suitable to my despised interest, to my wounded honor, without failing in the profound respect with which I am, both of the general Congress and of yourself, Monsieur le President, the very humble, &c.,

“CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.”

The Congress thought this letter rather bold, and, to teach their creditor to behave himself, they confided the examination of his debt to the sole man whom Beaumarchais had excluded from it—to Arthur Lee. The account was soon arranged. Arthur Lee pretended to discover that the contractor, to whom the Congress had, in 1779, sent such fine protestations of gratitude, and whose debt had been settled in 1781 at 3,600,000 livres, had not only nothing to

claim from the United States, but, on the contrary, owed the United States 1,800,000 francs. After four years of protestations on the part of Beaumarchais, Congress, in 1793, intrusted a fresh examination of this debt to one of the most distinguished statesmen of America, Mr. Alexander Hamilton, who, remodeling the fabulous account of Arthur Lee, made Beaumarchais pass from the position of a debtor to the amount of 1,800,000 francs to that of a legitimate creditor of the Congress for the sum of *two millions two hundred and eighty thousand francs*. There were, it will be seen, but four millions difference between the calculations of Arthur Lee and those of Mr. Hamilton; but at the same time Hamilton proposed that payment should be deferred until fresh endeavors had been made with the French government to obtain a communication respecting the mysterious receipt of one million received seven years previously, considering that if this receipt was signed by Beaumarchais, there was a reason for deducting one million from his claim. Conformably to the instructions of the Congress, the minister of the United States to the French Republic, Gouverneur Morris, in a letter under date of June 24, 1794, applied for this receipt to Buchot, then minister for foreign affairs. Buchot, without regard to the official declarations and to the refusals of his predecessors, wishing, he said, to give the United States the satisfaction which had been refused them by the ministers of the old *régime*, gave up to a foreign government a claim against an individual who, according to the terms of this claim, was only accountable toward the French government.

From this moment Beaumarchais' debt underwent a new series of difficulties. The Congress said to him: "In a contract signed between us and the French government, February 25, 1783, this government declares that it has given us, gratuitously, nine millions. We have received but eight; it is you who have received the ninth! Prove to us that this million, received by you June 10, 1776, is not that which was destined for us, otherwise we will deduct it from your debt."

Beaumarchais replied to the Congress: "I demand that due notice be taken of the most explicit declaration which I now make, that I have never received from King Louis XVI., from

his ministers, or from any person in the world, *either a million, or a single shilling, to be presented as a gift*; and that all the money I employed in your service as a zealous friend, as an honorable merchant, and simply in fair trading, was collected by me, either in France or in other states of Europe, in the way of loan or for investment; that all my creditors, less patient toward me than I have been toward you, have not let twenty years pass without requiring their account and its discharge, and if *there are still some to pay—a question which is foreign to you in your position as debtors*—it would be but an obligation the more to put me in a state to do so by paying me yourselves. As to the contract of 1783, the existence of which you inform me of, and of which I had always been in ignorance, I declare that this contract, in which I was not invited to take part, either by you or the ministers of France, is absolutely foreign to me, under whatever point of view it be examined, for the simple reason that I took no part in it, which was indispensable, if after ten years you were to endeavor to make it a reason for eluding or putting off my payment, after having exhausted all others.”*

Such was the interminable dispute in which Beaumarchais consumed the latter years of his life. At this period of the suit his fate was a very gloomy one. He was proscribed, had taken refuge in Hamburg, and believed himself ruined in France; he saw for his only daughter no other resource for the future than this American debt, and clung to it with all the energy of despair. From his garret at Hamburg he addressed volumes to the Congress, to the ministers of the United States, and even *to the whole American nation*. One of these unpublished Memoirs, written with a heavy and fatigued hand, struck me from its peroration, in which, through the heaviness of old age, we still see something of the *verve*, rather unequal, but highly colored, of the Beaumarchais of a former day.

“Americans,” says the old man, “I have served you with unwearyed zeal; I have received during my life nothing but bitterness for my recompense, and I die your creditor. Suffer me, then, in dying,

* Extracted from an unpublished Memorial of Beaumarchais of the 10th of April, 1795.

to bequeath to you my daughter to endow with a portion of what you owe me. Perhaps, after me, through the injustice of other persons, from which I shall no longer be able to defend myself, there will remain nothing in the world for her; and perhaps Providence has wished to procure for her, through your delay in paying me, a resource after my death against complete misfortune. Adopt her as a worthy child of the state! Her mother, equally unhappy, and my widow, her mother will conduct her to you. Let her be looked upon among you as the daughter of a citizen. But if, after this last effort, after all I have just said, contrary to all that seems possible, I could fear you would again reject my petition—if I could fear that to me or to my heirs you would refuse arbitrators, desperate, ruined as I am, as much through Europe as through you, and as your country is the only one where I can, without shame, extend my hand to the inhabitants, what remains for me to do except to supplicate Heaven to restore me for a short time to health, so as to permit me to travel to America? Arrived in the midst of you, with mind and body weakened, unable to maintain my rights, would it be necessary then that, with my proofs in my hand, I should be carried on a stool to the entrance of your national assemblies, and that, holding out to all the cap of liberty, with which no man has helped more than myself to decorate your heads, that I should exclaim to you, ‘Americans, bestow alms on your friend, whose accumulated services have received but this reward? *Date obolum Belisario!*’

“PIERRE-AUGUSTIN CARON BEAUMARCHAIS.

“Near Hamburg, April 10, 1795.”

The Congress remained deaf to the claims of its contractor; not only did they allow him to die without liquidating his debt, but during the thirty-six years which succeeded his death, from 1799 to 1835, every successive government in France, and every ambassador from these governments to the United States supported the claims of the heirs of Beaumarchais in vain. There was a settled opposition to this claim, which was religiously transmitted from one generation of legislators to another. Not only did they say, “We have to deduct from the debt, which was fixed in 1793, by Mr. Hamilton, at the sum of 2,280,000 livres, the sum of one million given for us to Beaumarchais, June 10th, 1776,” but they added, “As the interest of this million, of which we have had no account since 1776, absorbs the surplus, we are quits with the heirs of Beaumarchais, and will not pay them any thing.” On their side, the heirs of Beaumarchais replied to

the Congress, "According to Beaumarchais' account, you owed, in 1793, interest included, not 2,280,000 livres, as Mr. Hamilton put it down, but more than four millions. Pay us at least the sum fixed by your own reporter." As to the million which the United States claimed to deduct, the French government, resting upon the official declarations made to the Congress in 1778 by M. de Vergennes, interposed strongly in support of the heirs of Beaumarchais, and the first dispatch addressed by the minister Talleyrand on this question, Germinal 28, Year xi., to our ambassador in the United States, will render it unnecessary for us to reproduce all the other dispatches which were written successively by other ministers to the same effect.

"They bring forward," wrote Talleyrand to the heirs of M. de Beaumarchais, "a receipt given by the latter, the 10th June, 1776, for one million remitted to him, by order of M. de Vergennes, and wish to reckon this sum in the supplies furnished by him to the United States. As the payment and destination of this million related to a measure of secret policy, ordered by the king, and forthwith executed, it appears neither just nor equitable to confound it with the mercantile operations, posterior in date, of a private individual with the Congress. Consequently, no conclusion against M. de Beaumarchais, as a personal creditor of the United States, can be drawn from the document communicated by the ex-commissioner for foreign affairs, Buchot, to the American minister.

"I invite you, citizen minister, to support by your influence the claims of the Beaumarchais family, and to dwell upon the considerations of national good faith and honor to which they appeal. A French citizen, who risked for the sake of the Americans his whole fortune, and whose zeal and activity were essentially useful during the war which obtained for them their liberty and their rank among nations, might without doubt aspire to some favor: at least he ought always to be heard when he asks only for honesty and justice.

"Receive, &c., . . . TALLEYRAND."

In 1816, the government of the United States asked the Duke de Richelieu, who was then minister of foreign affairs, through M. Gallatin, if the French government would consent to declare formally that the million furnished June 10, 1776, to Beaumarchais, *had nothing in common with the supplies furnished by the said Beaumarchais to the United States.* The Duke de Richelieu, depending on the official note ad-

dressed to the Congress by M. Gérard, did not hesitate to make the declaration asked for. This was only correct in an official sense; but it seems to us that this should have been sufficient to terminate the dispute; for, indeed, admitting even that Beaumarchais had drawn all his money from the coffers of the state, there was certainly something strange and undignified in the attitude of a nation which had become powerful, and which, after receiving from an individual at a period of extreme distress most signal services, persisted in saying to this individual or his heirs, "Who gave you the money with which you assisted me so opportunely, and which you have claimed from me in vain so many years? I believe you received this money to make me a present of it. Your government has addressed to me on this subject, between 1778 and 1783, two declarations, one of which affirms positively that I ought to pay you for all your supplies, while the other leads me to think that it was intended to make me a present of one million out of the same supplies. Since this period, your government has declared, without intermission, that it has nothing to do with your commercial operations, and that I ought to pay you the whole; but, as I suspect there is some cabinet mystery beneath this, I prefer to suppose that the assistance you supplied to me was to be considered gratuitous, and that I ought not to pay for it either to your government, which does not claim payment, or to you, who claim it with their sanction."

Such was evidently the situation in which the government of the United States was placed by the formal declaration of the Duke of Richelieu in 1816. The government did not the less persist in disavowing the debt, and notwithstanding the favorable opinion of several eminent lawyers in America, notwithstanding the presence of the daughter of Beaumarchais, who in 1824 went, accompanied by one of her sons, to solicit the Congress in person, at each renewal of the debate there was found an inflexible majority to refuse the claim. It was not until 1835, when the famous affair of the twenty-five millions was brought forward for the second time, and when the rather violent proceedings of President Jackson had taught us that the American government was a less patient creditor

than ourselves, that the idea arose of entering the claim of the heirs of Beaumarchais in the list of compensations claimed in the name of France; but the claim was singularly reduced. For thirty-six years the family of the author of "The Barber of Seville" claimed at least the 2,280,000 francs which were allowed in the report of Mr. Hamilton in 1793; they had the choice given them in 1835 between *eight hundred thousand francs* or nothing; they preferred 800,000 francs, and this long and difficult suit between Beaumarchais and the United States was at length terminated, as so many suits are terminated, by a very unsatisfactory reckoning.

I have been anxious to relate the circumstances with entire impartiality. I think I have proved that the accusation made against Beaumarchais in America, of having deceived the French government by making it believe that he was sending supplies gratuitously to the Congress, while he demanded payment for them, is completely false.*

Admitting that the thing was possible, though it did not occur, it is evident from the letters of M. de Vergennes, from those of Beaumarchais, and from the explanations obtained at various times from the minister on the part of the Congress, that from the commencement to the end of the transaction, M. de Vergennes was constantly acquainted with the claims of Beaumarchais, and that if he had disapproved of them, nothing would have been easier for him than to oppose them, even without sacrificing that secrecy which the transaction required before the rupture with England, and still more so after that rupture. I have been obliged nevertheless, contrary to the very sincere opinion of the heirs of Beaumarchais, and

* This accusation is, above all, developed in a work entitled "A Political and Civil History of the United States of America, from 1763 to 1797," by Timothy Pitkin. I have been unable to procure Mr. Pitkin's work in France, but I have read a very complete *résumé* of that part of the work which is devoted to Beaumarchais in a French journal published in the United States; I have in my possession all the documents submitted to the Congress at different periods on the subject of this affair; I have also consulted the "Memoirs of Arthur Lee," Beaumarchais' most inveterate adversary, who was the first to spread the theory adopted by M. Pitkin; I was accordingly well acquainted with the theory I had to refute.

to the declarations of the different ministers since 1778, all based upon the first official declaration of M. de Vergennes—I have been obliged to re-establish the truth as to the fact of the celebrated million, which was incontestably given by the government, not for a *secret political service, unconnected with the American supplies*, but for the supplies themselves. Finding also in the archives of Foreign Affairs the material proof that Beaumarchais, independently of the first million, given June 10, 1776, received a second from the court of Spain, August 11, 1776, and a third paid by installments in the course of 1777, I have been obliged to mention all these facts because they are true, and because the first duty of a writer who respects himself is not to conceal the truth.

Now, from these facts, can any induction unfavorable to Beaumarchais be drawn? I do not think so. How can we admit, without clashing with all semblance of truth, that M. de Vergennes did not ask for any account of the employment of these three millions from an agent who bound himself formally to give him an account of the use he made of it in each of his receipts? The affair being one of those called *cabinet secrets*, it can be easily understood that the documents calculated to determine its character are rare. But it appears to us to result manifestly from the position taken by M. de Vergennes in the disputes between the Congress and Beaumarchais, that the latter must have presented to the minister an account of his profits and losses. It was not difficult for him to prove that beyond his claim of four millions upon the Congress, of which he vainly endeavored to procure payment, he had not only lost several vessels captured by the English cruisers, but that he had also suffered considerable losses in his transactions with the separate states of the Union; in the State of Virginia alone, upon the depreciation of paper money, he had experienced a loss which he estimated at *three millions*. “I am much grieved,” wrote Jefferson, then Governor of Virginia, in a letter of the date of the 15th September, 1799—“I am much grieved that the unfortunate depreciation of paper money should have enveloped in the general loss M. de Beaumarchais, who has deserved so well of us.” It was easy then for Beaumarchais to prove to M. de Vergennes that the

subvention received from France and Spain was much exceeded by his losses, and he must have done so, since M. de Vergennes permitted him to claim as a legitimate debt the sum which he demanded from the Congress: he must have done so, as we shall see at a later period; for, after having advanced him these three millions, the king and M. de Vergennes, to indemnify him for the loss of his flotilla after the battle of Grenada, granted him again, between 1784 and 1786, a private indemnification of *two millions*. Now is it not as clear as the day that the same king and the same minister would not have granted an indemnity of *two millions* to a man who had not yet given an account of the use he had made of the three millions which had been secretly confided to him ten years previously, for an affair which had already been completely terminated eight years, above all, when this man had just had "The Marriage of Figaro" produced.

To sum up and conclude with this mysterious affair, which in fifty years caused more than fifty dispatches to pass between France and America, not one of which is correct, Beaumarchais, without mentioning his claims against the private states of the Union, claimed in 1795, from the Congress, a sum of 4,141,171 livres, including the interest of the account gone over in 1781 by Silas Deane: *after forty years' discussion*, his heirs have received *eight hundred thousand francs*. He lost, then, a greater sum than the secret subsidy of *three millions* which he received. This result was less absolutely injurious in itself than if the subvention had not been given, but it does not any the more do honor to the gratitude and generosity of the American government.

It was not, then, in his transactions with the Congress that Beaumarchais enriched himself; they were the sources of losses rather than benefits to him; but when the subsidies from France and Spain had enabled him to open a commercial house on a large scale, he followed this new career with all the ardor he exhibited in his lawsuits and comedies, and entered into a great variety of speculations. These attempts were in general less profitable than they might have been, if Beaumarchais had not retained in his character of speculator all the qualities and defects of the artist: he loved difficult

enterprises, provided they were either brilliant or useful, and he embraced too many things at the same time.

I have before me a general catalogue of his affairs from the 1st of October, 1776, until the 30th September, 1783, that is to say, during the seven years which represent more particularly his commercial career. This catalogue shows that money passed through his hands to the amount of 21,044,191 livres in disbursements, and of 21,092,515 in receipts; the surplus, then, of the receipts over the disbursements was only 48,327 livres. It is true the expenditure relates to several enterprises which at a later period would bring in receipts; but the slight surplus of receipts over expenditure, during a period of seven years, is sufficient, it appears to me, to give us the idea of a merchant who was rather adventurous besides being most active and amusing. We have seen Beaumarchais hitherto mixing together commerce and politics; it will not, perhaps, be disagreeable to view him simply as a merchant, hurrying from one port to another, purchasing or constructing vessels, *curbing*, as he said, *his various captains, so as to obtain a little profit out of them*, and discussing naval expeditions with all the daring of a consummate privateer.

Among the five hundred letters which represent him under this aspect, I will quote but one. He is at Bordeaux superintending one of his armaments, and is writing to his agent Francy, who had returned from America, and was stopping at Paris.

"Bordeaux, October 19, 1782.

"Now, mon Francy, I know every thing respecting my armament, but I should not have known any thing if I had left before I had seen it. 'La Ménagère' will be thoroughly well commanded: Foligné (the name of the captain), in spite of some whims, is an excellent man; his staff is excellent, and his crew have the utmost good will! So much for the first. 'L'aimable Eugénie,' instead of being 600 tons burden, is hardly 500. Her captain is an intractable man, self-willed and careless. Without telling me any thing about it, they have put 32 cannons, 160 men, and all the necessary accompaniments on board; so that on its return, this vessel, whose expenses are 9000 livres a month, and which has cost me at least 300,000 livres, can only involve a loss. They have only taken 1000 barrels of flour, making 125 tons; 105 thousand of *poudre au roi*, making scarcely 50 tons; my cargo, which does not come to so much; and

the vessel is so fully laden that they have left at Nantes the iron bands which I required for 'La Ménagère,' and which they have not found sufficient room for.

"To make this vessel sail, they have 76,000 useless bricks in her as ballast instead of taking coals, which would have sold well at Saint Domingo. Besides this, they have thirty tons of iron in ballast, and their stowage was so badly made that they had to shift twenty-five tons of iron to prevent the vessel being thrown on her beam-ends in rough weather; but I have remedied as much as was in my power all these evils by the nature of the instructions I have given to Levaigueur and Father Poligné. So much for the second.

" 'L'Alexandre' sails like a *basket without a bottom*, that is the expression of Gregory (another captain), but she keeps a more even keel than the 'Eugénie;' she arrives in the river to-morrow from Rochelle. She has nothing in her wood, but her tackle, sails, and masts are all destroyed. She fought (could you believe it?) in the sight of four French frigates, and of a vessel of 64 guns, who did not make the least movement to help her. When the captain complained of it at Rochefort, they told him he ought to have made signals. The captain replied, very justly, that the noise and the fire of the cannons were the best signals he could have made.

"He is going to stop at Souillac without going up to Bordeaux, and I hope he will set off with the other two. He does not sail well enough to be sent alone any where. We must assist him, and I reckon upon having a freight from the king. Gregory himself is rather hot-headed; he will agree badly with Baudin (another captain), who is still more self-willed and despotic. I am going to curb them all, so that they may obey, and give me a little profit, for I expect but little from them, considering the price of commodities from Europe in the islands, the reduction in freightage, and the low price of commodities from the islands in Europe.

"Here, then, I am nailed, until they leave, in a place where I ought not to stay more than three weeks. Nothing would be done, I see, and every thing would again go to the devil.

"How is your delicate health? How is your gentle and very amiable sister-in-law? Your project of traveling in hot climates is only one of those ideas which invalids have and which reason restrains. Repose and diet are all that are necessary for you. Talk of my letter to my wife, so that she may be acquainted with every thing. I have all my staff here, and more than I want to occupy all my time. I do not know whether I shall be able to write to her to-day.

"Tell Cantini* I have received his last letter with its contents.

* It was his cashier, of whom he had later to complain, and who was replaced by the eldest brother of his friend Gudin.

I beg him to send me a line by every post, whether I write to him or not. I can finish every thing here in less than a fortnight, so there is now nearly an end to my journey. Good-by, mon Francy."

Young Francy liked extravagance; he had made money by the interest Beaumarchais had given him in his speculations, and although he was living in the house of his patron, he kept three horses for himself. Beaumarchais had also a certain taste for show: but sometimes the accusations of Dr. Dubourg returned to his mind; he feared envious detractors, felt himself seized by starts with a great love of simplicity, and addressed to Francy, in the midst of a letter on business, attacks *ab irato* in the style of the following, which is also dated from Bordeaux:

"Bordeaux, October 26, 1782.

"... What I disapprove of is, that you keep three horses at Paris; in your position, this extravagance is an absurdity, and more than useless. You make every body exclaim at me, exclaim at you, indeed at both of us. And at a time when I wish to retrench a portion of my expenses, I have the vexation of hearing it said that I am surrounded by the greatest extravagance. Certainly I ought not to account any more than you for my conduct to any one; however, there is what is called a regard for position, and when we break through it, we have all the foolish and all the envious relations, enemies, great persons and small, against us. As you are in my house, I am annoyed that they can tell me that every thing connected with me is in unrestrained extravagance. What the devil can you want with all this train? Come! live simply, and do away with what is useless. You are the cause of my not knowing any longer what takes place in my stables; I am robbed on every side, and this arises from the state of disorder by which they profit. Ten horses, with three coachmen, who combine to plunder me! I beg this of you as a favor; we are quite out of our places, my friend.* I am going to order the sale of two mares which belong to me; I shall have enough, even too many, with five, and do not be the cause of my inability to have order in my household. As soon as there is irregularity there is theft. What I ask of you is just and reasonable; I wish to live henceforth with the greatest simplicity. When you know from what high personages the censures which cause my remarks proceed, you will find I can not take too many precautions against malignity; you would not wish to do me harm, and all this does. I speak to you from my heart, as one friend to another."

* This was, in Beaumarchais, both full of good sense and delicacy.

In spite of the gentle manner in which they were put, these observations were doubtless displeasing to Francy, who was proud, somewhat capricious in his capacity of patient, and who kept three horses at his expense; for in the letter we have just quoted, Beaumarchais, who, though abroad he was always at war, in his home loved peace above every thing, replied to him amicably, "No one understands me or wishes to understand me. Well, do as you like; let us say no more about it, and attend to your health; that is the principal thing."

The health of the young man, who was suffering from a disease of the chest, was declining from day to day. He had gone to pass some time at Dunkirk with his friends. The author of "The Barber," in the midst of all his labors, found time to transform himself, for "his Francy," into a physician, and write a letter to him which seems to me full of kindness, from the delicate artifices that Beaumarchais employs to induce his young friend to follow a rigorous treatment.

"Paris, August 26, 1783.

"My poor Francy,—You are silly to say that I forget you; but, as you are also sick, I pardon you. If you pay as much attention to your health as I do, you will get well quickly enough. Only, my friend, you must have no pity on yourself, and must do rigorously what I am going to prescribe to you. I have had two very important conferences with M. Seiffert, your physician. He did not approve of your being bled in the foot, although he did not wish to tell you so. He feared to agitate your mind, and went round the question; but he always speaks plainly to me, and this is what I have heard from him as the result of his theory, and of the successful manner in which he applied it to Madame de St. Alban, who was on the point of death, and consequently very much worse than you are, for she had fever, had lost her voice, was wasting away, was spitting her lungs up, and, in fine, was despaired of and given up by every one. Hear how he argues: the acridity of the humor, which attacks a part either accidentally weakened or weak by nature, at last forms an ulcer, to which all the acrimony of the blood rushes; but then the spitting, and all the accidents which proceed from the part being injured, are themselves only a local evil, and all the remedies which may be applied palliate and alleviate this local evil without destroying the main disease. Whatever efforts may be made, if, through compassion for the patient, the principle of the disease be not fundamentally treated, he only lasts a time longer, and remains incurable. I only know, then (says M. Seiffert), one sole means, which consists

in turning away the humor from the course it has taken toward a weak part, and in directing it externally with decision, and even with violence; consequently, our physician, without attending to all the admirers, relations, flatterers, &c., of our pretty little St. Alban, clapped two blisters on to her two arms. They did not produce enough, according to him, and he clapped one upon her shoulders, and if the humor had not come in abundance, he was going to put one on her chest. Executioner! was cried out on all sides; but he continued his plan. Finally, my friend, she coughed less, spat less, found her appetite again, and when they were preparing to bewail her loss, they had to laugh with her about the universal plaster which had saved her life. She suffered—but what a difference in her fate! For the last six weeks she has been much better; she has recovered her flesh, her color, and her voice, both for speaking and singing. This is what I have before my eyes. Seiffert, then, condemns you, *and so do I*, to return and be blistered, or take upon yourself to do it where you are; but be sure that, after mature reflection, we are all of opinion that you must submit to it, and that your future health depends on it. All the rest will only suit the ignorant. ‘I should have done it to myself immediately,’ said Seiffert, ‘if my pain in the chest had not ceased.’ Cry out, if that solaces you; or come back, and we promise you to have no mercy for your repugnance.

“I can not thank your friends and mine too much for all the care they take of you; but if you are all in want of sufficient resolution to adopt our terrible regimen, come back to us, for there is no time to lose. Let us suffer for a few days in order to save the entire edifice, and do not let us wait till the danger becomes more pressing.

“This is the wish and ardent desire of your friend,

“CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.”

Beaumarchais’ solicitude could not save young Francy. He died a short time after receiving this letter, and his will, which I have before me, contains a clause which, taken in connection with the passage already quoted from Julie’s will, is an additional testimony in favor of the man of whom such an opinion was expressed by his friends on their deathbeds. After distributing among his family the somewhat considerable fortune which he had gained in the service of his patron, Francy terminates with these lines: “I appoint as executor of my will M. Caron de Beaumarchais, my friend; *the obligations I have toward him do not allow me to make him any legacy*, and I am convinced that he will willingly render me this last service.” It seems to me that there is something flattering to Beaumar-

chais in the reason assigned for not making him any legacy, and for expecting this last service from him.

To complete the picture of Beaumarchais' life at this period, we should have to show him, after the disastrous naval battle in which the Count de Grasse lost, in 1782, the most magnificent of our fleets, burning with a noble zeal in the midst of the general consternation, and sending men into all the cafés of Paris to cry out "Subscriptions, subscriptions," in order to obtain the means of replacing the vessels lost; writing to all the chambers of commerce in the kingdom, forwarding to each of them a hundred louis, and pressing them to adopt his idea. This idea soon spread like a train of powder: each town, each corporation, offered a vessel, and the disaster experienced by our navy was repaired with wonderful rapidity. Beaumarchais himself hurried through all our maritime towns in order to get up or increase the ardor of this patriotic movement. M. de Vergennes wrote to him as follows: "As minister I have no right to approve, but as citizen I do approve of the energetic feeling which you are communicating to your compatriots. Whatever success your step may have, it will none the less do honor to your zeal, and it is with much satisfaction that I compliment you upon it." Admiral D'Estaing, who went with Beaumarchais to Bordeaux, delighted with the co-operation of the author of "The Barber of Seville," wrote to him as follows, in his style, which is always somewhat droll: "When Jupiter's brain of fire was brought to bed of the belligerent Minerva, he certainly required a midwife like yourself." And Beaumarchais, continuing the metaphor, replied to the admiral: "Your midwife, as you call me, would only have made Jupiter produce a miscarriage instead of a Minerva, if, while disposing of every thing which did not lead to the end, she had not paid the greatest attention to every thing which contributed toward it." On the other side of these bursts of patriotism we should have to show Beaumarchais devoting himself to the most various commercial speculations—the establishment of a Bank of Discount, the germ of the Bank of France; a joint speculation with the brothers Péricr for the foundation of the fire-engine at Chaillot, &c.; but that would take us too far: of all his commercial affairs of this date, one

alone, from its literary and historical importance, and the various incidents connected with it, appears to us to deserve particular attention. At that one we will pause.

CHAPTER XXI.

Voltaire's Works.—The Margrave of Baden.—Beaumarchais and Catharine of Russia.—Opposition to Beaumarchais' Speculation.

It required a man with all the enterprise of Beaumarchais to undertake to print and publish, in 1770, the "*Œuvres Complètes*" of Voltaire. It was the largest publication that had then been attempted. The "*Encyclopédie*" was in thirty-three volumes only, while two editions of the "*Œuvres Complètes*" were to appear almost at the same time; the one in seventy volumes octavo, the other, a cheaper one, in ninety-two volumes duodecimo. It was not exactly the number of volumes which would have rendered this undertaking so alarming to any one but the author of "*The Barber*." There was a much greater difficulty still. Nearly half of Voltaire's works were prohibited in France. The prohibited works, nevertheless, circulated pretty freely, but from time to time the government thought itself compelled to perform an act of severity; editions were burned, and frequently the very men who bought and read them with the greatest eagerness sent to prison, for the sake of example, the shopkeepers who sold them. This clashing between what the law forbids and what society not only tolerates but seeks after, is one of the essential features of a state of society which is on the verge of ruin.

It was impossible, then, to print a complete edition of Voltaire's works in France; but it was necessary that, when printed, it should be possible for them to circulate them with some security. A severe prohibition would have proved mortal to so vast an enterprise. On the other side, considering its importance and the sensation it would make, how could it be hoped that a clamor would not be raised against it, and that even supposing government were inclined to favor it, they would not be forced to stop it? It was a risk no bookseller wished to run. Panckoucke, who had purchased Voltaire's

unpublished works from his heirs, and who had at first thought of bringing out the complete edition, thought the enterprise too dangerous, and offered it to Beaumarchais. If I am to believe the unpublished Memoirs of Gudin, the Empress Catharine of Russia had made a proposal to Panckoucke to print the collection of Voltaire's works at St. Petersburg. Gudin says:

"Beaumarchais, jealous of the honor of his country, no sooner heard of the steps taken by Catharine's agents than he hurried to Versailles to point out to the Count de Maurepas the disgrace it would be to France to allow the works of the man who was the greatest ornament to her literature to be published in Russia. The minister was much struck by what he said, but, placed between the two great bodies, the clergy and Parliament, he feared their opposition and the clamor of those timid minds who, *too much like the birds of night* (Gudin is still speaking), *are scared by the light of day*. After reflecting some moments, M. de Maurepas said to Beaumarchais, 'I know but one man who would dare to run the risk of such an undertaking.' 'Who, my lord?' 'You.' 'Yes, doubtless I would venture it; but after I have embarked my fortune in it, the clergy will appeal to Parliament, the edition will be stopped, the editor and the printers disgraced, and the shame of France rendered complete and more evident than ever.' M. de Maurepas promised that the king's patronage should be given to a publication which would have the assent of all sensible people, and which concerned the glory of his reign."

Beaumarchais thought himself obliged to collect, with scrupulous devotion, all that, during more than sixty years, had proceeded from the inexhaustible pen of Voltaire. To give more importance to this work, which was then quite an event, he founded, under the pompous title of "Literary, Typographical, and Philosophical Society," a company which consisted of himself alone ("the society, *which is myself*," he says in a letter to one of his intimate friends); and, at the same time, not to exasperate the jealousy of any one, he modestly called himself the *general correspondent* of this ideal association. He bought unpublished manuscripts to the amount of one hundred and sixty thousand francs at Panckoucke's book-shop, which scarcely contained more than one truly interesting paper—the fragments of the life of Voltaire, written by himself. He dispatched an agent to England to purchase, for a sum of

about 150,000 livres, the best printing types of the time, those of Baskerville; he sent another to Holland to study the manufacture of paper; he bought three paper-mills in the Vosges, and at last occupied himself with seeking beyond the limits of France, upon the frontier, for some neutral ground where he could found with security a vast typographical establishment.

The Margrave of Baden possessed at Kehl an old fort, since demolished, of which he made no use. Beaumarchais asked his permission to establish himself in this fort, on paying for it, let it be understood, and to collect there a large number of workmen, who would spend in his margravate all the money they gained by printing Voltaire. The proposition was seductive, but it presented some difficulties. The editor of Voltaire, a cautious man, required that the prince should bind himself, in writing, in case of legal proceedings, to allow the company to come upon his possessions in Alsace. The Margrave refused to do so, and Beaumarchais abandoned his demand. The Margrave, on his side, exacted a slight concession from Beaumarchais, which was nothing less than the right to suppress every thing in the works of Voltaire that was very offensive to religion and morality, promising, at the same time, to use this right with extreme moderation. Gudin maliciously asserts that what most disturbed the Margrave was the fear of passing for an accomplice in the insolence of the author of "*Candide*" toward the illustrious family of "*Thunder-ten-Tronck*" in particular, and the petty princes of Germany in general. However this might be, after much debating, the editor of Voltaire sent his ultimatum to the Margrave in the form of a letter declining to accede to his proposal.

The Margrave of Baden, seeing that it was absolutely necessary to choose between his scruples of morality and the advantage of letting Kehl, learning besides that another German prince (of Neuwied) appeared disposed to arrange with Beaumarchais, resigned himself to a capitulation of his morality, and allowed Voltaire to be printed without mutilation. Truth obliges me to add a fact which is not known, namely, that Beaumarchais, resembling in this respect his patron Voltaire, while yielding nothing to the moral scruples of a little German prince, was not wanting in complaisance when the ques-

tion of modesty was not in play. Thus the same man who refused to give up for the Margrave of Baden the paraphrase of the "Canticles," consented, to please Catharine II., to cancel portions of the correspondence of the empress with Voltaire, and to incur by that an increase of expense of which he vainly sought to be reimbursed in a letter to the Prince of Nassau, under date of the 6th October, 1790.

"I had begged you, mon prince, to learn from her majesty whether she had given any orders on the subject of the just satisfaction guaranteed to me in her name when I promised MM. de Montmorin and Grimm to cancel in every copy of every edition of Voltaire the portions which her majesty appeared to object to. I had given you a letter, in which these details were clearly explained, in which I stated, as a certain fact, that we had been obliged to reprint 412,000 pages, in order to put all the editions in the state she wished; that this expense, added to the undoing and binding of this immense collection, had not amounted to less than 15,000 livres. For above two years we have not had a word of reply on the subject."

To superintend the composition, printing, and publication of these 162 volumes (for the two editions), to introduce them fraudulently, though with the connivance of the authorities, but with the risk of a permanent prohibition, was an enterprise which was singularly laborious for a man already overwhelmed by so many other occupations. Beaumarchais seemed sometimes to bend under the weight of the burden. "Here am I," he exclaimed, "obliged to learn my letters at paper-making, printing, and bookselling." However, he learned his new trade quickly enough, and not one of the least interesting parts of his correspondence is that in which he discusses, from Paris, with his agent at Kehl, all the details of this immense undertaking.

It required three years for Beaumarchais to organize an enterprise started upon so vast a plan. Independently of the material difficulties, it was necessary to make a selection from the numerous printed and manuscript works attributed to Voltaire, many of which were not his, to compare and arrange pieces which had appeared twice over, to collect the correspondence of the author, and to make a choice from among his letters.

It was not till 1783 (although the prospectus was issued in

1780) that the first volume of the edition of Voltaire's works appeared. Beaumarchais neglected nothing to attract subscribers; not contented with making as much noise as possible in the foreign papers,* he invented a plan which has often been imitated since, under various forms: he offered prizes in the shape of medals and lottery tickets. A sum of 200,000 francs was devoted by him to forming 400 prizes in money in favor of the first 4000 subscribers; and although that number of subscribers was never attained, the promised lottery was drawn exactly at the periods fixed. The two editions could not be finished in less than seven years. This tardiness is explained by the numerous personal misfortunes which Beaumarchais had to undergo during that time, and by several obstacles inherent to the publication itself. He had reckoned upon the protection of the first minister, with whom he was in great favor; but M. de Maurepas died in November, 1781, and the editor of Voltaire lost in him a support against the attacks of the clergy and Parliament. The first of these parties complained several times to the king of the toleration the minister showed in favor of the works of an adversary to the Church; the second did not, I think, extend its zeal to any formal proceeding. They, however, circulated a very violent pamphlet, entitled "Denunciation to the Parliament of the Subscription for the works of Voltaire," with this motto: *Ullulate et clamate*. Beaumarchais replied to this pamphlet in the foreign journals by jesting on the motto, but still continued his publication.

The persecution was not very lasting or very severe, to judge of it by the following letter, which, while giving us the exact date of the last volume of the complete works of Voltaire, proves at the same time the connivance of the government during the whole transaction. It is addressed by Beaumarchais to the Director-general of the Post-office, M. d'Ogny.

"Paris, September 1, 1790.

"Monsieur,—I can now only offer you barren thanks for the good offices you rendered me in the most difficult times. This volume of

* The edition, being forbidden by law, could not be advertised in the French journals.

the 'Life of Voltaire,' which I have the honor to address to you, completes the work.

"But, sir, I can never forget that without your kind assistance we should have remained on the road, and, expiring at our work, should have been unable to give to impatient Europe the collection of the works of the great man. This bold enterprise has been a loss to me of above a million, in capital and interest; but thanks to you, sir, I have kept my word, and that is a consolation to me. Some necessary matters which have been delayed still occupy our presses. Every thing that comes from them, sir, shall be addressed to you, as a slight tribute of my gratitude.

"I salute, honor, and love you.

BEAUMARCHAIS."

This letter and several others proves that, of all Beaumarchais' speculations, the edition of Voltaire was the most unfortunate. Expecting an enthusiastic success, he had printed 15,000 copies, and he had scarcely 2000 subscribers. Whether the previous edition, that of Geneva by Cramer, in spite of its incompleteness, had injured his, or that the delay in producing the work had cooled the public, or that the fanaticism for Voltaire had already begun to decline, or that the state of agitation into which France was soon afterward thrown rendered readers less disposed to purchase so expensive a work, it is certain that Beaumarchais lost the enormous sums he had risked, and that, after the dissolution of his establishment at Kehl, where he besides printed an edition of Rousseau and a few other works, all the benefits he derived from his trade of publisher were masses of printed paper, which were heaped up in his house in the Faubourg St. Antoine, which afterward caused some rather unfriendly visits from the sovereign people, who were persuaded that the author of "The Barber of Seville" was monopolizing either wheat or arms, and were quite astonished to find there no other provisions or arms than those of an intellectual description.

CHAPTER XXII.

Position of Beaumarchais before the Representation of "The Marriage of Figaro."—Opposition to the Performance.—Beaumarchais exercising the Censorship.—Beaumarchais and the Prince of Nassau.—A Paladin of the Middle Ages in the eighteenth Century.

WE have now arrived at the highest and most brilliant point in Beaumarchais' career. He has reached the apogee of his fortune, his celebrity, and his influence over public opinion. After having ascertained by his own experience of life the inconveniences of an order of things in which intelligence reduced to self-dependence can only assert itself by indirect means, he is about to compensate himself, to some extent, for the mortifications without number he has undergone in conquering a position which, while exposing him to the jealousy of his enemies, does not preserve him from their disdain. He is about to attack the whole of society, and to make it admit the justness of his ridicule. He will be seen for a moment uniting in himself all the impulses of destruction or reformation which are agitating his country. With a boldness hitherto unknown, he will apply the dissolvent of irony to a form of society which is falling from decay, and with his cap and bells will open the road to more redoubtable destroyers.

We must, however, avoid exaggerating, as is often done, the revolutionary *intentions* of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," and consequently the aberration of a power which tolerated attacks of which the results have alone shown us the tendency. In the present day we judge Beaumarchais' work from the events which followed it, and we are too much inclined to exaggerate, either for good or evil, the significance of this comedy. In undertaking to combine in a single theatrical piece attacks upon various abuses and various social states which many authors before himself, from Molière to Le Sage, had attacked separately, and in conducting this attack with the audacious, and even licentious vivacity which characterized his talent, Beaumarchais was far from imagining that he

was helping to prepare a general overthrow, and that society had reached such a degree of weakness that a comedy which was itself not very healthy, but which, like all comedies, assumed the power of curing, would become an additional evil, and would contribute to carry off the patient. What is already known of Beaumarchais proves superabundantly, independently of what will be read farther on, that he was not a very fierce revolutionist, and that the four or five first articles by which, in the present day, every constitution, even of the feeblest description, invariably opens, would have sufficed to satisfy his political temperament. Disposed to censure vanities, privileges, and abuses from which he had suffered more than once, he was certainly far from being disposed to push things to extremities, and to welcome with enthusiasm a social convulsion which was destined soon to go far beyond his ideas, and to overturn and ruin him at the very moment when he was approaching the age of rest, and only aspired to enjoy in peace the opulence which he had acquired so laboriously. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" wrote his comedy, then, with sentiments of a much less subversive description than is generally supposed by those persons who are unaware that he possessed at this epoch a fortune of several millions; he wrote with his eyes closed to the future, thinking only of the present pleasure of enjoying a new dramatic success, taking his revenge for the humiliations and acts of injustice from which neither his wit nor his riches had been able to secure him, of continuing with greater boldness the mission of Molière, of making the small laugh at the expense of the great, and amusing the great themselves, while interesting their self-love, so that they should not recognize themselves in a somewhat exaggerated picture of the abuses of rank and fortune.

Madame Campan has preserved for us, in her Memoirs, the picture of a scene in which Louis XVI., alone with Marie Antoinette, has "The Marriage of Figaro" read to him. After the famous monologue in the fifth act, the king exclaimed, "It is detestable; it will never be played. It would be necessary to destroy the Bastille to prevent the representation of this piece being a dangerous anomaly. This man laughs at every thing which ought to be respected in a government."

"It will not be played, then?" said the queen, whose tone seemed to indicate a certain inclination for the piece. "No, certainly," said the king, "you may be sure of it."

Louis XVI., then, was decidedly opposed to the representation beforehand of "The Marriage of Figaro;" his opposition was shared by the keeper of the seals, who was supported in his hostility by M. Suard. It was this opposition, very formidable from the rank of the persons composing it, if not from their numbers, which by means of numbers had to be overcome. Beaumarchais manœuvred in such a manner that a moment arrived when it may be said, almost without exaggeration, that all Paris, except the king, the keeper of the seals, and M. Suard, desired to see "The Marriage of Figaro" played, and desired this with an ardor of impatient curiosity, against which a government can do nothing, when this fever, taking possession of an idle and frivolous society, becomes its fixed idea, dominating and absorbing every other preoccupation.

We have still to inquire how public curiosity could have been overexcited to such a point on the subject of a comedy which in itself is not absolutely a masterpiece; here something must be allowed both for Beaumarchais' skill and for his altogether exceptional position. If he had only been a writer of genius, struggling against the will of a king, a minister, and a censor, his piece would never have seen the light, or it would have had to undergo considerable modifications; but he then held a position quite apart in the history of celebrated writers, which allowed him, at the same time, to make use of a number of very different influences. As this situation, strange as it was, furnishes a means of explaining his success in a struggle apparently so disproportionate, we must first of all endeavor to depict and characterize it by means of numerous documents which we have before us.

A popular writer, a clever financier, Beaumarchais, during the period of four or five years which preceded "The Marriage of Figaro," was, moreover, a species of statesman on a small scale, consulted secretly by the ministers. We have seen him, under the influence of the very marked favor granted to him by M. de Maurepas, obtain, to a certain point, the confi-

dence of M. de Vergennes, and act, incognito, a somewhat important part in French politics, in connection with the United States; but his intervention in public affairs was not confined to this isolated case; we find in his papers the proof that, whether he put himself forward, or whether he was invited to do so, he interfered often enough in questions of administration or finance. We find him, for example, in 1779, at the request of M. de Maurepas, deliberating with M. de Vergennes on a plan for reorganizing the taxation, and having frequent interviews with this minister, who writes to him several letters on the subject of the plan in question, of which I shall only quote one.

"If you will come here, sir, to-morrow, Thursday evening, at six o'clock, with your assistant,* we can have a long interview in continuation of the work commenced last week. I tell you beforehand that I shall have an adjunct who enjoys the entire confidence of our Mentor;† I wish him to be present because, in a matter of so great an importance, it is impossible to have the views of too many persons.

"With the pleasure I always feel, sir, I repeat to you the expression of my sentiments, &c.

"Wednesday, March 17, 1779."

Beaumarchais writes on his side, in sending to M. de Vergennes, a Memorial on this scheme: "Monsieur le Comte, I have the honor to address to you a faithful account of our last conference; the necessity of copying my own notes myself, on account of the secrecy imposed, has prevented my sending to you until this moment. I have given an elementary form to this account, in order that, when M. de Maurepas shows it to the king, his inexperience in affairs of so complicated a nature may not prevent him from understanding all its bearings." Farther on, we find the minister Necker entering into communication with Beaumarchais, either on the subject of the transit of tobacco from America, or on the most economical means of supplying provisions to the French troops sent to the United States. Farther on again, we find another minister

* This was, doubtless, some other financier, who was associated with Beaumarchais in this plan for reorganizing the taxation, which was not carried out.

† The Mentor is M. de Maurepas; it is a title which M. de Vergennes often gives him in his letters.

of finance, M. Joly de Fleury, consulting Beaumarchais on a projected loan; elsewhere we find the minister of marine asking for his opinion, or commissioning him to superintend some financial operation relative to his department. Frequently Beaumarchais interferes himself, by means of various Memorials, in questions of general interest, such, for instance, as the "civil condition of the Protestants," for whom, in the default of any thing better, he contributes at least to obtain admission into the Chambers of Commerce. Certain towns, such as Bordeaux, excluded them still in 1779, when the finances of the state were directed by a Protestant.

Sometimes, even by a rather amusing contrast, Beaumarchais, who was so often at open war with the censorship, finds himself invested with the functions, not of an official, but of an officious censor. "Here, sir," writes the lieutenant of police, Lenoir, to him, in a letter dated December 19, 1779, "is a manuscript, for which permission to print is requested. I have not read it; I beg you to give me your opinion about it." It was a singular idea to transform into a censor a man who was so frequently censured. Beaumarchais' answer indicates a little embarrassment in the exercise of functions of this kind. The work submitted to him turned upon the American war, upon the subject of which he had himself written a pamphlet, which had just been partially suppressed. He replied to the magistrate that he found nothing blamable in the work, full of "political pleasantry," which had been addressed to him, and that the censorship, "properly so called," ought not to prevent its publication. However, as he does not wish to be inferior to the austere part of censor, and as he acknowledges that the tone of the work in question is not in harmony with the gravity of the subject, he adds these lines, which are rather curious as coming from the pen of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." "This work is wanting in that *patriotic decorum*, so little known in this country, in which every thing is made the subject of jest; present events are the sacred vases of politics; we should either be silent, or assume the elevated tone which inspires respect. After this, sir, you will take whatever course appears to you the most just." It is seen from this that Beaumarchais has no vocation for the office of censor, and that he scarcely knows how to conclude.

On bad terms with M. Necker, in consequence of some disagreement on the subject of financial measures, and probably also from the natural unsuitableness between the well-known stiffness of the Genevese minister and the easy freedom of his own manners, Beaumarchais was most intimate with the rival and successor of M. Necker, M. de Calonne, who appears to have had a very marked liking for him. The reader will, perhaps, be astonished to find—at the very epoch when one is accustomed to look upon Beaumarchais as a sort of factious person, battling with all the authorities in order to obtain the production of a seditious comedy—the reader will be astonished to hear of M. de Calonne granting him, on the part of the king, a considerable indemnity, which he had long claimed in vain, while he addresses to him one of the kindest letters, written throughout in his own hand, and of which the date is valuable, for it precedes only by three months that of the first representation of “The Marriage of Figaro.”

It was not only for his own advantage that Beaumarchais made use of his influence with the ministers, he was the patron of a host of petitioners ; men of letters, artists, financiers, lawyers, actors, actresses, all addressed themselves to him. Whether he was pleading with M. de Maurepas for Marmontel, who requested a place, which I believe was that of historiographer ; whether he was undertaking the defense of the president Dupaty, his friend, before the keeper of the seals, against the cabals of some magistrates who had raised the Parliament of Bordeaux against him ; whether he was requesting M. Necker to come to the assistance of some banker in distress ; or whether, pressed by the supplications of the La Reynière family, who are frightened by the wildness of one of their sons, he went so far as to solicit from a minister of the king's household, M. de Breteuil, the prolongation of a *lettre de cachet* against this maniacal and vindictive son ; or whether, in fine, he had to use his influence for some artiste with the nobles who then directed the royal theatres, Beaumarchais worked for others with as much ardor and persistence as for himself.

The situation of Beaumarchais as a man of the world in the period which precedes “The Marriage of Figaro” would furnish matter for sufficiently numerous quotations, in which the

son of the watchmaker Caron would be seen freeing his style from the crudities which sometimes appear in it, in order to compete, in grace and elegance, with a sufficiently large number of fair ladies. We will here again confine ourselves to presenting a single specimen of this mundane side of Beaumarchais' wit, and we select it as serving to characterize, to a certain extent, the manners of the time. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was rather intimate with the Marquis de Girardin, at whose house Rousseau had just died, at Ermanonville. The marquis had a son, a young officer, who was then called the Viscount d'Ermanonville, and who became at a later period one of the popular orators of the Restoration, under the name of Stanislas de Girardin. This young officer, when in garrison at Vitry, having heard of a song "*plus que grivoise*," which Beaumarchais had composed in his youth, and which was sung with success among sub-lieutenants, desired to possess an exact copy of this masterpiece, and instead of applying for it, either to the author himself or to M. de Girardin, his father, which might still appear to us allowable, he took a course which in the present day seems rather strange; he wrote to the marchioness, his mother, to beg her to procure him from Beaumarchais this not very moral present, and the marchioness, who, to tell the truth, did not exactly know to what point the "*levity*" of this song was carried, hastened to transmit to Beaumarchais her son's request in the following note:

"Wednesday.

"My son has written to me, sir, for a song of yours *about women*. As one can not do better than address the author himself to obtain the real one, I hope you will not refuse this satisfaction to a young man who desires it much. As it is directed, according to what I hear, against my sex, if you fear it would not be polite to address it to me, you will have the kindness to send it to him himself.* M. de Girardin has informed me of the pleasure he had of having you at his house for some days, and his regret at your stay having been so short.

"I have the honor to be your very humble and very obedient servant,

B. DE GIRARDIN."

* "To M. le Vicomte d'Ermanonville, officer in the regiment of the Colonel-general in garrison at Vitry."

Now comes Beaumarchais' answer :

“Paris, March 25, 1780.

“No, Madame la Marquise, I will not send your son the song you ask me to give him. He may wish for it because he is not acquainted with it; but I, who repent having composed it in a moment of ill-humor, when I was insane enough to wish to punish the whole of the fair sex for the levity of one coquette—in one of those moments so much at variance with the conduct of the Savior, in which one would make the whole world suffer for the sins of a single person, I shall not open the heart of a young man to impressions unfavorable to those he ought to love and serve, after the king, all his life. The work of M. Thomas, madame, in which the author has celebrated the virtues of the ladies, in two handsome volumes, is what you must send him.

“For the rest, as no one is a better judge of what is profitable or injurious to her son than an excellent mother like yourself, I have the honor to address this song to you, one of the greatest errors of my youth. It is for you, madame, to keep it from him or to let him have it. I wash my hands, among the innocent, of the evil which may result from it to the son, if the mother becomes the accomplice of my past fault, after I have made her the confidante of my present scruples. Nor shall I seek to excuse to you the blasphemies of my song with the guilty levity with which I did so formerly, when a lady who was incensed asked me why I did not make songs about the men. ‘Were they more perfect in my eyes?’ ‘The black defects of men,’ I said to her, ‘are only fit to be punished; those of women alone are charming to sing, sometimes even to share.’ That was certainly the speech of a young man who was abandoned by God, and lost in licentiousness. In the present day I am far from approving of such lax morality, and if I take upon myself to send you the song with all it has blamable about it, I do so as much to humiliate myself before you for having committed the fault of writing it, as to give you a direct proof of the obedience and respectful regard with which, Madame la Marquise, I have the honor to be, &c.,

“CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.”

There is another side of Beaumarchais's life at this epoch which possesses interest not only in itself, but also as explaining the influence he could exercise at a given moment. He is not only a man who has a hold on the minister, who protects a great many petitioners, and who has very extensive connections in society; he is also an opulent financier, who is thought more rich than he really is, and who gives or lends a great deal of money to all sorts of persons. His cashier, Gu-

din, states that twenty applications for money reached him, on the average, every day; and this can be accounted for. By continually speaking ill of him, his enemies obliged him to speak well of himself. He was often obliged to make some display of his generosity. The consequence was, that the public took him at his word, and that from all parts of France he was called upon to prove that he was not a boaster. Among the invitations of this kind there are some rather original ones.

"The devil take me, sir," writes a young lieutenant to him, from Saint Brieuc, "you are a delightful man. I have just read your Memorials,* which have given me infinite pleasure. It is impossible to dispose of people more thoroughly. I have been told that you are very rich; well, the difference is, that I am not at all rich, and that twenty-five louis would make me very rich indeed. Then, in all conscience, in order to do things as pleasantly as you say them, you should send me these twenty-five louis; I will return them to you in a year, on the faith of an honest man. I can see you laughing and saying, 'Who is this madman?' and why so? you have plenty of money, as I presume; as for me, I have very little. I suppose you to be a benevolent man, who would rescue a poor devil from trouble by lending him twenty-five louis, which he is in a position to restore to you. What is there surprising in that? I have never seen you! Well, you ought to be more obliged to me for thinking you sufficiently generous to lend twenty-five louis to a man who wants them, and whom you have never seen. Do not amuse yourself at my expense, and send my letter to the superior officers of my regiment; you would make me wish for a hole to hide myself in, which, at all events, has never happened to me. But no; I am convinced that you will do better, and that you will send me these twenty-five louis. Come, sir, give me your hand, and let it be a bargain. I give you my word of honor that you enjoy in my mind all possible consideration and respect, joined to all the admiration of which I am capable, because I know you by your works, and that I feel no regard for persons with whose name alone I am acquainted."

"THE CHEVALIER DE SAINT-MARTIN,

"Sub-lieutenant in the regiment of Aquitaine (Infantry).

"Saint Brieuc, Brittany, August 24, 1780."

On this letter Beaumarchais has written, "Answered September 20th, 1780." Unfortunately I can not find the copy of his answer. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was

* These were the memorials against Goëzman, which this officer read rather late in the day, as his letter was written in 1780.

original enough himself to be able to appreciate the originality of the request, and I should not be astonished if he had sent the twenty-five louis. When we find a sub-lieutenant, perfectly unknown to Beaumarchais, thus attacking his purse from the depths of Brittany, we can easily understand to what degree he must have been tormented by all the varieties of petitioners, borrowers, and all the unhappy beings with which Paris abounds. His papers are full of incidents of this kind. I will cite one out of a thousand, because it relates to a rather celebrated poet, and because Beaumarchais, who for the rest never mentioned it, even after the death of the man he had obliged with so much delicacy, appears in it worthy of the part of Mæcenæ, which he was so fond of playing during this brilliant period of his life.

Every one knows Dorat, but every one does not perhaps know that this poet, whose name gives the idea of a frivolous and careless life, died at the age of forty-six, a prey to the deepest grief. He was a weak man, but endowed with the most delicate sentiments. After having been in possession of a certain amount of property, want of order, vanity, and also accidents independent of his will, had reduced him, little by little, to complete ruin, and even to a still more painful condition, for he was crushed by a heap of debts; and with a heart proud enough to suffer mortally from it, he had not strength of mind sufficient to undertake a courageous struggle with fate. His health had gone, and he was pining gradually away, concealing as he best could the mental anguish which was devouring him beneath the paint, *mouche*, and ribbons of his character as "bard of the graces." It was then that his friend, Countess Fanny de Beauharnais—she who, according to Lebrun, "composed her face, but not her verses," who was nevertheless an excellent woman—after rendering to Dorat all the services allowed by her very limited personal resources, decided, without the knowledge of her friend, on applying to Beaumarchais, whom she did not know at all, and who was but very slightly acquainted with Dorat. She consequently wrote a very touching letter to the author of "The Barber of Seville," in which, after describing Dorat's distress, and informing him that a mutual friend would tell him more, she

asked for a loan of 20,000 francs. To lend 20,000 francs to a man completely ruined was to give them. Beaumarchais at first thought the sum rather large; the following is his first answer to Madame de Beauharnais :

“Paris, March 20, 1779.

“Your letter, Madame la Comtesse, affected me deeply. Never did tender friendship paint its solicitude in a more touching manner. I know you, honor you, and I love you from this letter; but how you afflict me by asking for your friend assistance which it is out of my power to give! I esteem him, and think highly of his works; besides, I consider we ought to do as much good as we can in order to be as happy as our station will admit: such is my natural feeling, and the fruit of a whole life’s reflection. I hold to it without display, and careless of what men may say or think of me. Now let us return to your case, madame.

“Your confidence excites mine, and I ought to speak without reserve. People are mistaken about the easiness of my circumstances, as about all my other affairs. I am not a great capitalist, but a great administrator. The fortune of my friends, confided to my prudence, obliges me to be circumspect and scrupulous in the use of their funds; whence it follows that I can give a suffering friend 25, 50, or 100 louis, by taking them from the money which belongs to me in the business; but I can do no more without placing in my cash-box a sum in paper equivalent to the money I draw from it; and I know too well that poor people can not give good equivalents for the money they borrow: that is just the reason why they are in want of it. It is therefore with much pain that I find it physically impossible to lend your friend the large sum he requires.

“As to those private loans which my sensibility has drawn from me incessantly during the last four years, the cursed reputation I have of being a rich man has caused such an accumulation of these demands, that it seems as if all the unfortunate people in the kingdom had agreed to oppress my heart, and to load it with unhappiness. I can not open my letters without grief, as I am always sure to find in them the fresh misfortune of becoming acquainted with another sufferer, often without having it in my power to assist him.

“Such is my life: great labor, small rewards; an expensive station in life, little fortune, and an eternal circle of the most heart-rending correspondence with a host of poor creatures whose wants have become my own. If you have a friend who knows me well, he will tell you that this picture of myself and my position is the truest I can give you.

“However this may be, madame, make this mutual friend come

and see me ; since he has deserved your confidence, he shall have mine. We will talk over M. Dorat's affairs ; he will explain to me the nature of his wants, his fears, and his hopes, and when I am better informed on the subject, if I can assist him, believe me, madame, that while burying with the most religious scrupulousness all that he wishes to be kept secret, I will overcome impossibilities in order that your confidence in me may not be totally useless to him.

"I have the honor to be, with the greatest respect, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

Just as Beaumarchais was finishing this letter, Dorat's new advocate, whom Madame de Beauharnais had announced without naming, entered ; he was an officer of whom we shall have occasion to speak again, and who was one of his oldest friends. Beaumarchais then added a postscript to his letter, which allows us in some measure to follow the working of the good feeling which prompted him :

"My friend Datilly came just as I was about to close this letter : his story pierces my very heart. I certainly can not dispose of the 20,000 francs which you require ; but once more ; if M. Dorat, who is slightly acquainted with me, is not offended at your having confided the secret of his misfortunes to me, get him to come and talk over it frankly with me, or deign to give me the particulars, and all my resources shall be at his service."

Madame de Beauharnais answered Beaumarchais that Dorat was in the country, and would go to him on his return. A fortnight passed ; Beaumarchais wanted to leave Paris in order to arrange some business ; he feared that Dorat's pride would prevent his calling on him, and, as impatient to assist an unfortunate person as another would be to avoid him, he wrote a second letter to Madame de Beauharnais, which seems to me to be the expression of a truly excellent heart. Let the reader judge for himself :

"Paris, April 5, 1779.

"I have not seen your friend, Madame la Comtesse. Is he still in the country, or does he disapprove of the confidence you placed in me ?

"It would be well for us to have a conference before my departure for Bordeaux, which will take place in a few days. He is perhaps ignorant of the courage and strength possessed by a sensitive man who has been tried by adverse fortune. I am that man, and, very different from those whose fortune has improved, I take pleas-

ure in consoling the unfortunate who are deserving, and of restoring to them that spring, so necessary to the mind, which misfortune always unbends. Perhaps, by dint of thinking, I may have found some way of helping him out of his distress. I do not know, but something tells me that I shall not be quite useless to him. I shudder when I think that one moment of despair lost the life of poor Mairobert, who had a thousand ways of amply redeeming his character from the bad effects of a sentence which was, perhaps, rather too thoughtlessly pronounced.* He asked to see me; he said he was in want of my advice. Without knowing what his trouble was, I wrote to him that he would always be welcome, for I had known him for twenty years as a wild fellow and brave man. The sentence of Parliament was suddenly passed; he killed himself. If he did not deserve the sentence, at any rate he was wrong in putting an end to his life. With courage and patience one can overcome every thing; if he was guilty, I forgive him: one can not survive deserved shame.

"The present case is very different; but this Mairobert has darkened my heart. I do not like an unfortunate person to suffer without communicating his troubles. No one knows to what point the head in that state may be excited. Again, madame, do send your friend, that I may see him, that he may hear me! And, if possible, we will succeed in saving him by uniting his efforts with mine.

"I have the honor to be, with the greatest respect, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

At last Dorat went to this generous man, who so cordially offered his assistance; and from the tone of his letter to Beaumarchais, after their hearts had been opened at the first interview, we can appreciate the delicacy with which the author of "The Barber of Seville" knew how to encourage and assist those in whom he was interested.

"April 12, 1779.

"Monsieur et cher ami," wrote Dorat—"after your conduct toward me, allow me to address you by this title—what pleasure I have in assuring you that I left your house relieved of a great burden, penetrated with the greatest gratitude, and consoled for the first time in three years, during which I have been struggling inwardly, with the most painful courage, against all the crises of my position. You were, doubtless, the only person in the world who could free me from them. When your name was mentioned to me, I became tran-

* This Mairobert was a rather clever writer, invested with the functions of censor. Being implicated, says Grimm, in a dishonorable manner in a lawsuit relating to the Marquis du Brunoy, he opened his veins in a warm bath.

quil. The same strength of mind which made you overcome all your enemies, has now become turned into pity for the unfortunate. I am proud at having discovered your virtues in the midst of your talents, which are at once so brilliant, so charming. I tell you all that my heart, which you have solaced and which yearns toward you, inspires me with. It is a pleasure for me to have cause for loving one I have always esteemed. You asked me the real state of my affairs. I owe nearly sixty thousand francs—for half I could get time allowed; but my honor, my rest, my health, my life indeed, require me to pay the rest in the course of a year or fifteen months, at different times. All the engagements I make with you shall be sacred: I would sign them with my blood. Madame de B., whose fortune will be considerable, will, if necessary, be security; and two interesting beings will offer to you, with tears of gratitude, two souls which make but one.

"Forgive the disorder of my letter and of my ideas; I am involuntarily moved while writing to you. I think, by dint of kindness, you have made me better than I was, and I certainly was not wicked; but let me confide to you the weight which oppresses and kills me."

Then follows a detailed account of his debts; but the unhappy poet deceived himself: he hoped to clear himself by his labor, and he was dying. He offered his signature: it was of no value; that of Madame de Beauharnais was worth no more. Beaumarchais saw all this clearly; he asked for no signature: what he did was merely to soothe the last days of an interesting man who was dying; he authorized Dorat to draw upon him from month to month for the sums he required. In ten months, the 29th of April, 1780, Dorat died. During these ten months Beaumarchais had given him, in sums of 25 and 50 louis, 8400 livres; and the cashier Gudin, after carefully adding up the sums, wrote on the poet's papers, in the terrible language of an accountant: "*Dorat died insolvent, No. 23.*" He was No. 23 of the Insolvent Debtors. These numbers go beyond the hundred in the papers of the author of "The Barber of Seville."

Beaumarchais, however, was sometimes tired of being the banker of so many poor literary men; he turned a deaf ear to them, and this was considered cruel. We know with what bitterness Rivarol loved to exercise his satirical vein on him; this is how the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" became acquainted with the Rivarols. The following letter is from

the younger of the two brothers, who was also somewhat of a literary character, and who afterward became field-marshal during the Restoration. At the time at which it was written, the elder Rivarol had not yet published any thing against Beaumarchais.

"Sir,—I have not the honor to be known to you, and yet I apply to you to beg you to render me an important service, which I am perfectly convinced you will not refuse me. You are oppressed and calumniated because you have not met with success, and done good; envy has attached itself to you; it follows you as the shadow follows the substance; the multitude are against you, but there are some upright feeling minds, who know how to do you justice, and I am of the number. You would not have so many enemies if you were without merit; insignificant men are ignored. Voltaire says somewhere, 'A few enemies make one miserable, but many are an honor.' Therefore, sir, you ought to console yourself. What can you care for those little minds which cry out against you? With talents, philosophy, and fortune, are you not sufficiently revenged on them? For a long time I have spoken highly of you in the society I frequent. I have taken up young fops and old fools, who sought, without foundation, to depreciate you, and even to blacken your fame. I have succeeded in silencing them, by preaching the truth to them, and asking them continually whether they know M. de Beaumarchais, and if they had ever visited him. They dare not say Yes.

"This is the way of the world, sir; calumny is eternally distilling its poisons without precaution and without care. I myself have been its victim for having had some wretched verses printed in the public papers. A crowd of literary boys rose against me; they sought to torment me, and they succeeded, because I am violent and sensitive, and I have now abandoned this sad profession. I am going to follow that of arms, which I had neglected for the study of letters, and I will manage to distinguish myself as my ancestors did. I have lately obtained some employment in the service of the States-General (Holland); my family resides in Languedoc, and I am to set out instantly. I have not time to write to them. At Paris I have many acquaintances, and but one friend, and this friend is not in easy circumstances, which is quite natural: friendship requires so perfect an equality; as Milton says, 'Among equals no society.'

"In consideration of what I have confessed to you, I must beg of you to lend me twenty-five louis. If you refuse, you will cause me to lose a profession which may afford me those means of existence I am now in want of. I will give you my note of honor for this sum; and that you may not have the least suspicion about what I have said

—as I have not the honor to be known to you—you would greatly oblige me by making inquiries of M. le Marquis de Bourzac, lieutenant-colonel of the corps I am about to enter. I shall require a year, sir, to repay you this sum, and you may rely on my word. If you will allow me to have the honor to see you, you will soon learn to know me. My heart is always open, although to men it ought always to be closed; in spite of my youth, I have already experienced this. Allow me, sir, to present you with a little poem which I published last year, and a tale which I have just had printed.* I have taken for my motto, ‘Il vaut mieux faire des riens que de ne rien faire.’

“I am, with the greatest respect, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

THE CHEVALIER DE RIVAROL.

“P.S.—The Marquis de Bourzac lives Rue Montmartre, near the Egoût; and I live Rue Neuve-St.-Roch, opposite the Rue des Moines.”

It is probable that Beaumarchais was insensible to the eloquence of this letter, and did not lend the wished-for sum; for, dating from this time, the warm enthusiasm of the chevalier turned, in the person of his brother the count, into outrageous, pointed contempt; but what is curious is, that at the very time when the most celebrated of the Rivarols was attacking Beaumarchais most violently, another member of the family persisted in tormenting him with very pressing and frequent demands for money. This was no other than the actual wife of this charming Count of Rivarol, who, after having married the daughter of an English writing-master, abandoned her, and left her with a child and the more or less authentic title of Countess. Among Beaumarchais’ papers are the most lamentable missives left by this poor woman. The author of “The Marriage of Figaro” revenged himself on the count by giving from time to time a few crowns to the countess, which procured him the pleasure of comparing the sentimental prose of the wife with the bitter satire of the husband. The contrast is striking: “I sought a man, sir,” writes the Countess de Rivarol, “and I found a god. I will but say with Pericles, ‘Ah, my son, we were dying, if not dead!’ My pretty little creature can not yet understand me. Grant my mater-

* The date of the tale in question, called “Osman; or, Fatalism,” gives us that of the letter, which is not dated; it was written in 1785.

nal affection the pleasure of presenting him to you one of these days, that he may stretch out his pretty little hands to you as to his God and his Savior." While Beaumarchais was supplying the wife and child of Rivarol with bread, the latter wrote against him the celebrated parody of the "Recit de Thérémène," and thus did their actions differ.

Every one must agree that Beaumarchais was not ill-natured, for he had only to circulate Madame de Rivarol's letters to reduce the husband to silence.

By the side of the literary people who besieged Beaumarchais for money were several noblemen. They formed for him a sort of *clientèle* of patrician debtors, who helped him sometimes to surmount the difficulties of his position.

Of all Beaumarchais' aristocratic debtors, the most original, beyond contradiction, is the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, representative of the Catholic branch of the house of Nassau. A comedy might be made of Beaumarchais' relations with this prince and the princess his wife, who was not less eccentric than her husband. These relations of very close friendship lasted more than ten years, and the numerous evidences of it, which remain in the papers of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," present the elements of a picture of manners which we will content ourselves with merely sketching. All the survivors of ancient France who have left us their *souvenirs* of the period preceding the Revolution—M. de Ségur, the Duke de Levis, the Prince de Ligne, Madame Lebrun, &c.—all agree in representing the Prince de Nassau-Siegen as one of the strangest characters of his time. "He was," says M. de Ségur, "a true phenomenon in the midst of a time and country in which the effect of a long civilization has been to give to all minds a uniform resemblance." "The Prince of Nassau," says the Duke de Levis, "had the greater number of those qualities which enter into the character of heroes—their enterprising disposition, prodigious activity, love of glory, and a sovereign contempt for life. He sought out opportunities for distinguishing himself, and these opportunities did not fail him; however, he only left the reputation of an adventurer, and during his life had more celebrity than consideration." We can already recognize some analogy, which will help to explain

the intimacy between Beaumarchais and the prince, whose life we will first of all sum up. The Prince of Nassau had through his grandmother, Charlotte de Mailly, aunt of the Duchess of Châteauroux, French blood in his veins; his origin was even thought to be completely French, as the legitimacy of his father, although acknowledged by a decree of the Parliament of Paris, had been contested, and denied in Germany by the Aulic Council. Thus Nassau found himself, from his youth, a German prince recognized in France, rejected in Germany, and deprived of his principedom. At the age of fifteen he had enlisted in a French regiment as a volunteer; at eighteen he was a captain of dragoons, and he first attracted public attention by sailing round the world with Bougainville. In his travels he had had famous duels with tigers and lions, which had procured him the surname of "the tamer of monsters;" and on his return he had been appointed colonel of the royal German regiment (cavalry). Although he had a preference for residing in Paris or Versailles, he led the life of a Paladin of the Middle Ages, always in quest of adventures and warlike enterprises. Wherever there was fighting in Europe he was sure to be found; at one time, commanding a floating battery at the celebrated siege of Gibraltar, he was seen to quit his burning boat last of all, and to swim to the shore with a smile on his lips under a hail of cannon balls; at another time, in the service of Russia, with flat-bottomed boats he destroyed a Turkish squadron at Oczakow, or dispersed a Swedish fleet in the Baltic. Cavalry or infantry soldier, general or admiral, he sought with equal ardor every kind of combat on both elements, and this warrior of fabulous daring, this "tamer of monsters," who was otherwise tall and personally well formed "had," says Madame Lebrun, in her "Souvenirs," "the mild and timid air of a young lady who is coming out of her convent." This was the heroic side of the Prince of Nassau: his comic side consisted in an absolute impossibility to appreciate the value of money, which fell through his fingers like water; so much so, that this hero, the most essentially "cracked" of all heroes, divided his life between dispersing fleets, routing battalions, and flying terror-stricken before creditors, process-servers, and bailiffs, who did not leave him an instant's repose.

It was by this weak side that the Prince of Nassau had attached himself to Beaumarchais as to a guardian angel destined to preserve him from the only kind of danger which he feared. It was Beaumarchais who had to pay the most dangerous creditors, to make the others wait, to revise the fantastic accounts of some, to guard against the snares laid by others; in a word, to extricate his hero from the infernal band which was always attached to his steps.

The intimacy between Beaumarchais and the prince had commenced in 1779; the following was the occasion. As there was some idea, at this time, of invading England, Nassau, who had already the command of a regiment of cavalry, had, moreover, formed a body of men called the Nassau Legion, and had attempted, with his ordinary intrepidity, a *coup de main* upon the island of Jersey. The French government having renounced its project, the prince requested that the volunteers who had been formed by him might be incorporated with the king's troops, and that he might be paid for them, the money being destined for repaying the expenses of equipment, which he had advanced, or, rather, for which he had run into debt, and for indemnifying the officers of the corps for their expenses. The minister of marine, fearing that the money, if given directly to the Prince of Nassau, would disappear as usual, to the detriment of the creditors of the legion, had commissioned Beaumarchais to superintend the liquidation, and to advance the necessary sums by installments, taking care to pay the creditors before indemnifying the prince. The situation of Beaumarchais was a delicate one. Nassau, constantly harassed by personal creditors, was perpetually asking for money. Beaumarchais, while giving him a little, endeavored to make him understand that it was necessary, first of all, to pay the creditors of the legion, and profited by the occasion to give this hero, from time to time, some lessons in domestic economy.

"My prince," he writes to him, under date of August 1, 1779, "I have the honor to remit to you a *rescription* of 6000 livres. You must not be displeased with me if I imitate good parents, who economize on the pleasures of their children in order to liquidate their important debts. Many persons think it wrong, even now, that I should take upon myself to set aside, for your wants, 500 louis, which

if paid over, they say, to the treasurer of the navy, would have been, in consequence of their opposition, reserved for paying them in preference to your personal orders. It is certain that they are right in this respect. Will you permit me to ask you also, my prince, why you have a courier who costs from eighteen to twenty louis, for a purpose which can be equally well attained by the transmission of a letter for thirty sous? Either you pay very slight attention to your expenses, or your wants are not so pressing as you say; and I am but the sad echo of this reflection, which may strike you as much as it did me, when it was made before me.

"If you find me somewhat more austere, my prince, than my reputation as a lively man seems to comport, attribute it only to the serious and genuine interest which I take in your troubles; they require all the care, and the most continuous attention, on the part of those who are laboring to free you from them.

"I place myself among the number of these zealous laborers, while assuring you of the profound respect with which I am, my prince, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

These first relations between Nassau and Beaumarchais had soon brought about an intimacy which went on increasing, and the prince had accustomed himself, little by little, to look upon his friend as a sort of guardian, and, above all, as a treasurer who had been given him by Nature: "The cash-box of M. de Beaumarchais," said the guardian of this cash-box, Gudin, "had become that of the prince, who went to it for every thing he wanted." "My dear friend, deliver me from my creditors; they overwhelm me, and turn my head. . . . My dear Beaumarchais, I recommend my affairs to you, as you promised to look to them, and I beg you to be certain that the friendship I have sworn to you will only finish with my life." Such is the ordinary refrain of the innumerable letters from the Prince de Nassau to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." The latter gives himself up with an inexhaustible complaisance, mingled, however, sometimes with ill-humor, to this part of treasurer and guardian which the Princess of Nassau contributes, for her part, to render very difficult, for she is as much "cracked" as her husband.

She was a Polish princess, who had been married to Prince Sangusko, and divorced. Although Poland is a Catholic country, it is known that divorce is tolerated there. The Prince of Nassau was anxious to have his marriage recognized by the

Archbishop of Paris; and he was so much accustomed to make use of Beaumarchais in every thing, that it was he again who had to plead in this affair, and who transmitted to the prelate the request of the prince, supported by himself. I regret to have been unable to find Beaumarchais' plea in reference to the question, but the reader will, perhaps, not be sorry to meet with the answer of the austere prelate, Christophe de Beaumont, to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" pleading for a divorced princess:

"Paris, Sept. 13, 1780.

"I send you, sir, my answer to the letter with which the Prince de Nassau has honored me. You will be kind enough to transmit it to him. I will not conceal from you that this answer is a negative one. In spite of my desire to enter into the views of the prince, I could not have countenanced his marriage without acting contrarily to the principles of the Latin Church, which recognizes no cause of divorce, and especially against the principles of the Gallican Church, in which there has been no instance of such marriages. Besides, in France there is a perfect conformity between the civil and ecclesiastical laws on the subject of divorce.

"Nothing can be added to the sincerity of the sentiments with which I am, sir, your very humble and very obedient servant,

"+ CHRISTOPHE, Archbishop of Paris."

In spite of the refusal of the archbishop, the marriage of the prince, in consideration of its having been contracted in Poland, was recognized none the less at the court of Versailles, and his wife received as Princess of Nassau. "This couple," says the Duke de Levis, "were well matched. The princess was a tall, thin woman, who had some remains of beauty. Without being perfectly straight, she showed some elegance in her figure; her manners were noble and polished; but she had more imagination than judgment. Her thoughts were unconnected; and, like the majority of Polish women, her heart was better than her head." This princess, in fact, threw money away, as we have said, with the same facility as her husband. Like her husband, she adored Beaumarchais, and, like her husband, she made too free a use of his cash-box. "I can not conceive," writes the author of "The Barber of Seville" to the august couple—doubtless his patience had been almost worn out that day—"I can not conceive how two per-

sons so witty as yourself and the princess can continue to combine the most lamentable distress and the most reckless prodigality." The distress, in fact, sometimes goes very far: out of two hundred letters from the princess, there are certainly a hundred scrawled in an almost illegible handwriting, the object of all of which is to make an appeal to the purse of friend *Bonmarchais*; the princess, by the way, could never succeed in writing the name of her friend correctly. The following are some specimens of these letters from a princess:

"It is a long time since I have seen you, my dear *Bonmarchais*, and you are about to read the proof of it: it is that I am again without a sou. Send me some louis by the bearer, my friend, if you wish me to dine to-morrow."

Another one:

"My dear *Bonmarchais*, I am in despair; but I must positively go to-morrow on business to Versailles, and I have not the smallest crown. Send me, if you can, some louis."

Variation on the same theme:

"My dear *Bonmarchais*, here is the breakfast sent me to-day by my *maitre d'hôtel*; see whether it is easy to digest.* M. de Nassau went to him, and asked him for his account. We must manage to talk over it, and to prolong the discussion until we are able to pay him. In the mean while, my friend, send me what you can. Adieu; pardon me if I torment you almost as much as I am tormented."

Friend *Bonmarchais* scolds, preaches economy, and always ends by sacrificing himself with sufficiently good grace.

The prince, on his side, offers rather amusing points of originality, such, for instance, as setting out for the wars, and leaving his wife to deal with his numerous and insupportable creditors. If the princess takes it into her head to write to him about his affairs, just as he is going up to the assault of Gibraltar, he himself addresses to Beaumarchais the following lines:

"My dear Beaumarchais, it is agreeable enough, when one has a regiment of cavalry and a corps of infantry in France, to come to Spain and command one of the floating batteries which are to open

* It was doubtless some letter from the princess's *maitre d'hôtel*, refusing to support her any longer at his expense.

the gate of Gibraltar;* but tell Madame de Nassau, I beg of you, that it is ridiculous to consult me as she does about all my affairs. I have given her a very general procuration, because I leave every thing to her. If she requires advice she has only to ask you: it will be more valuable than mine. Mind you tell her that I shall not send any answer in future to those parts of her letters which speak of business affairs. Adieu, my dear Beaumarchais. Believe me, no one is more attached to you than myself.

NASSAU.

"July 25, 1783."

It was, indeed, rather hard for a hero to be pursued by stamped paper beneath the very fire of the enemy; but, on the other side, the poor princess did not know where to turn her head. The prince had estates in Flanders, which he offered for sale: unfortunately, there were lawsuits which prevented these lands being sold. The princess had also property in Poland, which she sold, and which enabled her to pay a portion of her husband's debts; but the gulf was frightful and difficult to fill up. She exclaimed loudly, and referred all these annoyances to friend *Bonmarchais*, in whose papers we thus find the most varied types of the prince's creditor under the ancient *régime*, from the most civil and complaisant, true personifications of M. Dimanche, to the most overbearing, who talked philosophy, and would serve execution on a hero as if he were a simple mortal.

In the mean while the prince was covering himself with glory at the siege of Gibraltar. The King of Spain granted him the rank of grandee; but it appeared that this honor necessitated the spending of money: the prince, as usual, had none; and also, as usual, the princess, who had no more, applied for some to Beaumarchais. The latter, who had already furnished the sums necessary for the warrior's equipment, caused himself to be pressed a little. However, he was magnanimous.

"Although I am horribly pushed," he writes to the princess, "I am going to transmit to him at Madrid a thousand crowns more from the bottom of my purse, and you can write to him by to-morrow's post that they are at his orders with the same banker at Madrid who supplied him with the former funds. I can not suffer that,

* This attack is known to have failed; but it was conducted in part by the Prince of Nassau, with rare intrepidity.

while he is covering himself with glory, and endeavoring to repair his position, the embarrassments of ordinary life should be a most melancholy obstacle to him."

The princess, who loved her husband passionately, was profuse in her thanks.

"What shall I say to you, my dear friend?" she writes to Beaumarchais; "how am I to express to you all my gratitude, and on what occasion could I feel more, than when you come forward to assist all I have dearest to me in the world? I send him your letter; I need not make him feel all he owes to you; he has a heart like mine, and knows you as well as myself."

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who has the inventive faculty, and who would be the more delighted to see the prince pay his creditors from the fact that his highness owes him a great deal of money, points out to his illustrious friend an ingenious means of profiting by the admiration felt by the King of Spain for his brilliant courage. The prince, who has already been round the world, is to tell his majesty that he wishes to perform the voyage again, and is to ask him as an only favor for free entry for two vessels and their cargoes to all the ports of the Spanish colonies. This permission having been obtained, the prince is to have recourse to the King of France, and to beg him to lend him two vessels to sail round the world in a second time, and to manage by this rather out-of-the-way course to pay his debts. These two favors having been obtained, Beaumarchais is to exert himself to find a company of merchants who will undertake to supply the two vessels with merchandise, and to advance to the prince 500,000 francs. Nassau adopted this skillful combination with enthusiasm. The King of Spain granted the favor requested. It only remained to obtain the two vessels from the King of France. With this view the prince addressed to Louis XVI. a long memorial on the state of his affairs; he solicited a decree of protection from his creditors, set forth the plan which was to enable him to pay his debts, and in favor of his military services requested the loan of two vessels. The most curious thing in this Memorial, after the combination for rescuing a hero from his creditors without costing any thing to the state, is that, in terminating his petition, the

Prince of Nassau invokes the testimony and support of Beaumarchais, "who is willing," he says, "in consequence of his attachment for me, to give all his attention to the entire settlement of my debts." And Beaumarchais supports the prince's petition to Louis XVI. in the following note:

"If the testimony of a man of honor can give some weight to the facts set forth in this Memorial, I attest that since the marriage of the Prince of Nassau-Siegen, through the greatest sacrifices on the part of the princess his wife, both of her lands and of her diamonds and other property, the prince has paid nearly one hundred thousand crowns of his debts.

"I certify that all the money granted by his majesty for paying the debts of the prince, in connection with his campaign of Jersey, which money passed through my hands on the invitation of the Count de Maurepas and M. de Sartines, was entirely applied to paying the creditors who had furnished supplies for this campaign, without a crown having been applied to the personal use of the prince.*

"I certify that there is still due on this campaign, to different creditors, the sum of 280,000 francs, for the payment of which the tranquillity of the prince, and very often my own, have been disturbed.

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS.

"May 10, 1783."

The prince's petition had at first been received by the new minister of marine, M. de Castries, who promised the two vessels; but the prince having had a quarrel with the minister, the affair miscarried. Nassau, always avoiding his creditors, started for Poland, where he distinguished himself in the service of King Stanislaus Augustus, arguing with heavy sabrecuts in the Diets against the Czartorisky party. The prince afterward went into the service of Catharine, beat the Turks and Swedes, and while Europe was resounding with the fame of his name, kept up with Beaumarchais a correspondence, in which the latter recalled from time to time to his glorious friend, "placed," as he says, "at the head of the warriors of Europe," the necessities of actual life, and reminded him that it would not be amiss "to let his creditors see at least a few crowns."

"My prince," he writes to him, "your horses, which were seized in the possession of the Duke de Lauzun, are not sold, and are eat-

* It has been seen above that this assertion was not perhaps rigorously exact; but it has also been seen that Beaumarchais had done all that was possible for it to be so.

ing themselves up. Nor has the money for the sale of Villers come in. I do not send you all your arms, which the unhappy armorer Toupriand left with me when I advanced the money for taking them out of the Mont de Piété, because this armorer has placed an opposition in my hands, which can not be raised until all his accounts with you have been liquidated. You asked me for a good surgeon, as the trade you pursue renders such a man indispensable to you. I send you this useful surgeon at the same time as your useless valets. . . . I send you back your diamonds, of which I have not made use, as there is too much difference between the value the jewelers, the second-hand dealers, and the Jews assign to them and that attributed to them by yourself. . . . I was unable to pay the bill of exchange which the princess drew on me from Warsaw, because I had no more money at liberty after all I had advanced for you. . . . However, you have your military successes, which are consoling to my friendship. A great man in petticoats who governs Russia—this hero's head on a handsome woman's body,* has not failed to seize the opportunity of making you contribute to the triumph of her arms. I congratulate you again on her august good-will toward you. I have added up all the corps-d'armée which you are going to join. They come to 470,000 men, according to your letter. With such forces the universe might be taken. Like a preux chevalier, you have her portrait; you will cry to her from afar, 'Lady of my thoughts, I am going to fight for you.' Fly, then, to Constantinople; but, *above all, do not get killed*. This is all I ask of you, and the future is your own. Adieu, my prince.

"I am, with inviolable attachment, &c.,

"CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS."

The reader will comprehend the vivacity of this exclamation—*do not get killed!* which is repeated in several of Beaumarchais' letters to the Prince of Nassau, when he knows that his warrior, who was celebrated for his rashness, was at this moment both the friend of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," and his debtor to the amount of 125,000 francs. Beaumarchais, for the rest, shows himself a very obliging creditor; for whether he considers that too much pressing would not in any way advance him, or whether it be a result of his friendship, I find him writing as follows to the

* These lines, written in 1786, are somewhat hyperbolic, considering that, at this epoch, Catharine was fifty-seven years old. Her rather diminutive figure had been invaded by a sufficiently ungraceful *embon-point*; but Beaumarchais saw the empress from a distance.

Prince of Nassau at St. Petersburg, under date April 25, 1791:

"As the dearness of the exchange, which you mention to me, my prince, in your last letter, as a reason for my consenting that you should postpone the payment of my claim, has not prevented you from paying persons who had obliged you with a zeal which was much less lively and less disinterested than mine, it would appear to me to be the effect of some displeasure of which I am ignorant, if I were not aware that I am the man on whose easy disposition you have always reckoned the most. You have too much honor for me to feel at all anxious; you will pay me when you think you ought, and are able to do so without interfering with your comfort. The atmosphere of liberty has not destroyed my sensibility. I am like Robin, '*toujours le même*,' and I should like to love you with the disinterestedness of a sylph.

"Receive the congratulations of the Cultivator

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

After the death of Beaumarchais, the cashier Gudin states that the claim of his patron on the Prince of Nassau, having been reduced no doubt by installments, amounted to the sum of 79,858 francs. Was this debt paid by the prince, who survived Beaumarchais a sufficiently long time, or must this *Paladin of the Middle Ages* be ranked among the *insolvent debtors*? This last hypothesis appears to me the most probable. However this may have been, from what precedes, the reader will be better able to catch the true physiognomy of Beaumarchais' existence at the period of "The Marriage of Figaro," and will understand what a variety of resources he could, when necessary, employ in order to get a piece played, in spite of Louis XVI., the keeper of the seals, and M. Suard.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The Marriage of Figaro."—First Representation.—Geoffrey and the Comedy.—Distribution of the Parts.—The Benevolent Maternal Institution.—The Tiger and the Flea.—Beaumarchais in St. Lazare.—Quarrel with Mirabeau.

"THE Marriage of Figaro," which was not to be played for the first time until the 27th of April, 1784, was completed by the author, and received at the Théâtre-Français toward the close of 1781. If we believe an unpublished letter of Beaumarchais', stating to the minister of the king's household, M. de Breteuil, the vicissitudes which his piece experienced before reaching the point of representation, the earlier readings of it must have taken place without the author's knowledge.

At the commencement of 1782, the question stands thus: the king has read the manuscript; declares the piece *detestable* and *un-actable*; many persons about the court probably begin by joining in chorus; and Beaumarchais undertakes to contend against what he calls the "proscription of the court" (being unwilling to specify more precisely, because he already has some warm partisans at the court) by exciting the curiosity of the town with readings skillfully managed. It soon became a question who could obtain the favor of hearing him, whether at his own house or in the most brilliant saloons, giving these readings of his piece, which, we are assured, he executed with remarkable talent. "Every day," writes Madame Campan, "persons were heard to say, 'I was present, or I shall be present, at a reading of Beaumarchais' piece.'"

In June, 1783, Beaumarchais, who, it must not be forgotten, conducted twenty other affairs at the same time with this, seemed at one moment on the point of obtaining a victory over the king and the keeper of the seals, and of seeing his piece played at the theatre of the court itself. By the influence of I know not whom, the actors suddenly received orders to learn the piece "for the service of Versailles." It was subsequent-

ly decided that it should be acted in Paris, in the theatre of the hotel of the Menus-Plaisirs. Tickets were distributed to all the court; the carriages already thronged about the entrance of the theatre; when, at the very moment the performance was about to commence, an express order arrived from the king forbidding the performance of the piece in any theatre or in any place whatsoever! "This prohibition by the king" says Madame Campan, "seemed an attack upon the public liberty. So many disappointed hopes excited dissatisfaction to such a point, that the words 'oppression' and 'tyranny' were never pronounced with more passion and vehemence than then, in the days which preceded the downfall of the throne."

Why had the king determined to prohibit thus, at the last moment, a representation of which he could not have been ignorant, as it had been prepared by the very persons who surrounded him? All that we find on this subject among Beaumarchais' papers is limited to the following passage in the unpublished letter to M. de Breteuil: "I really do not know what court intriguers solicited and obtained the express prohibition of the king against acting the piece at the Menus-Plaisirs; or rather I think it unnecessary to repeat it to him, who knows much better than I. I again patiently replace the piece in my portfolio, waiting until another event shall draw it forth." In fact, another very soon did present itself; and this comedy, which we have just seen the king forbid to be represented, was played with his *permission* before the whole court, and the Count d'Artois, at the country house of the Count de Vaudreuil.

A few months afterward Beaumarchais learned in England that the piece which the king had prohibited was to be acted before the court, and that they were only waiting for his permission. He returned immediately to Paris, and this time, profiting by the circumstances, made his own conditions. It was not exactly his object to amuse the court in secret, but to appear before the public and make them laugh at the court, which was a very different thing; provided, however, that one led to the other, Beaumarchais would be delighted to please MM. de Vaudreuil and De Fronsac. Only, before consenting

to the performance at Gennevilliers, he *innocently* exacted that the favor of a new examination should be granted him; a singular request to begin with. "But," he was told, "your piece has already been read by the censor and approved of, and we have the king's permission." "Never mind, I must have a fresh examination." "I was found rather particular in my turn," he wrote to M. de Breteuil, "and they said I made difficulties merely because I was sought after; but as I was determined to settle public opinion by this new examination, I insisted on its being granted, and the severe historian, M. Gaillard, of the French Academy, was named censor by the magistrate of police."

Some days afterward the entire court had the pleasure of attending the performance of a piece which the king had declared to be detestable and unactable. It is even said that the queen would have appeared at Gennevilliers had she not been prevented by an indisposition. It is very probable, as Madame Lebrun relates, that the ladies complained of the heat, and that Beaumarchais broke the panes of glass with his cane, and that this gave rise to the neat *mot*, "*qu'il avait doublement cassé les vitres;*" but when Madame Lebrun describes him as intoxicated with joy, rushing about on all sides like a man out of his senses, she looks at him through the prism of the time that has gone by and of her own imagination, never doubting that instead of *cruelly harassing* M. de Vaudreuil as she believed, Beaumarchais had been contented to let him come round to him, to allow himself to be solicited and flattered by him, and to make use quietly of his influence.

The very day after the performance at Gennevilliers, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," behaving as if his cause was gained, had formally applied to the lieutenant of police for permission to have his comedy brought out. This officer had replied that the king's prohibition, given the day of the performance at the Menus-Plaisirs, was still in force, and that he must refer the matter to his majesty. "Two months afterward," writes Beaumarchais, in his unpublished letter to M. de Breteuil, "the lieutenant of police told me the king had deigned to reply that *he was told there were still some things* which ought not to remain in the work; that one or two new

censors must be named, and that the author would be able to make the corrections more easily, as the piece was long. Monsieur Lenoir had the kindness to add that he should look upon this letter of the king's as countermanding the prohibition to play the piece immediately after its examination by the new censors."

The piece was given to the third censor, who made some modifications and gave his approval. The king required a fourth, who made very few corrections and gave his approval. He required a fifth. This one, Bret, gave his approval without making any corrections.

What could be done against a man who successively changed five censors into five advocates; who had on his side M. de Vaudreuil, M. de Fronsac, and the Prince de Nassau (then in Paris, and fighting boldly for his friend); all the youth of both sexes belonging to the court, actors and actresses, who, relying on a brilliant and fertile success, complained loudly of the injustice committed toward their theatre, and the whole of the public impatient, and loudly demanding to have their curiosity satisfied? What could the king, assisted by the keeper of the seals, and Suard, do against this explosion? They were obliged to grant to the world what had been granted to the courtiers of Gennevilliers. We are assured that, in order to remove the king's scruples completely, some clever friends or awkward enemies of Beaumarchais' continually repeated to him that the piece would not meet with success; and, as the king wished this might be the case with all his heart, he yielded to the feverish curiosity of the public, in hopes its expectations would be deceived.

In March, 1784, Beaumarchais obtained the long-asked-for permission, and hastened to communicate the news to the actor Préville, who was then in the country, in the following letter, which is full of the joy and pride of triumph:

"Paris, March 31, 1784.

"We have both made a mistake, my old friend. I was trembling lest you should leave the theatre at Easter, and you thought 'The Marriage of Figaro' would never be played. But one must never despair of keeping an actor who is adored by the public, nor of seeing a courageous author conquer when he believes he is in the right, and can not be disheartened by the most disheartening things. My

dear old friend, I have the consent of the king, that of the minister, and that of the lieutenant of police ; I now only want yours to make a nice disturbance when we commence. Come, my dear friend. My piece is but a trifle, but to see it on the stage is the result of a contest of four years. This is what makes me think so much of it. What a deal of harm those malicious persons have done ! Two years ago my friend Prévile would have assured the success of my five acts ; now, the charm he will lend to an inferior character will cause the greatest regret that he does not play the first.*

"I am advised to have it studied and rehearsed quietly, and we have agreed to do so, without saying any thing. Dazincourt and Laporte have undertaken to write to every one, desiring them to keep it secret, so that our good luck may not be spoiled once more. I greet, honor, and love you.

BEAUMARCHAIS."

The description of the first performance of "The Marriage of Figaro" is in every history of the period. It is one of the best known souvenirs of the eighteenth century. All Paris rushed, even in the morning, to the doors of the Théâtre-Française ; ladies of the highest rank dined in the actresses' rooms in order to be sure of places ; "*cordons bleus*," says Bachaumont, "mixed up in the crowd, and elbowing with Savoyards ; the guard dispersed, the doors knocked in, the iron gates broken by the efforts of the assailants." "Three persons suffocated," says La Harpe ; "one more," he adds maliciously, "than for Scudéry." On the stage, after the curtain was raised, was seen perhaps the most splendid assemblage of talent which was ever contained within the walls of the Théâtre-Française, all employed in promoting the success of a comedy which sparkled with wit, and carried the audience along by its dramatic movement and audacity, which, if it shocked or startled some of the private boxes, enchanted, excited, and inflamed an electrified pit.

Such is the picture which is to be found every where, and which, therefore, it is not necessary for us to dwell upon. We will only add one thing more, which will perhaps complete it, namely, that Beaumarchais was in all this tumult, in

* In order to understand this, it must be known that Prévile, who at first was to have played the part of Figaro, was now too old and worn out for such an important character, and had given it up to Dazincourt ; but, as he wished to contribute to the success of the piece, he consented to accept the part of Brid'oison.

a *loge grillée*,* between two abbés, with whom he had been having a jovial dinner, and whose presence had seemed indispensable to him, in order that they might administer to him, he said, "*des secours très-spirituels*" in case of death. We think this detail was wanting to complete the description of the first performance of "The Marriage of Figaro."†

A critic who was rather celebrated at the beginning of this century, and who has left a few good pages, unfortunately mixed with many others written in a coarse tone, and with a great dearth of ideas—Geoffroy—after having treated Beaumarchais to a broadside of insults, summed up his opinion of "The Marriage of Figaro" in the following manner in the year 1802: "Now that there are no more princes nor powerful nobles, nor a Maupeou Parliament; now, when we criticise 'Figaro' as if with the experience of ten centuries, it is nothing but a villainous rhapsody—a hash up of equivoques, grotesque conceits, puns, and quibbles. This debauch of wit, this wild style, still excite from time to time the laugh one gives to a farce; but after laughing at them we despise them."

How was it that Geoffroy, who was so humble in presence of political success, did not understand that literary success, when prolonged and sustained, is also of some value? and that if Beaumarchais' merit consisted in dazzling and deceiving people—which even then is not a talent which all possess—it was not with villainous rhapsodies alone that he could con-

* *I. e.*, a private box with a screen of lattice-work in front.—TRANS.

† We conclude this to have been the case from an invitation to dinner, addressed by Beaumarchais to the Abbé de Calonne, brother of the minister, for the day for the first representation of "The Marriage of Figaro," and which terminates thus: "Come, then, come; my Andalusian barber will not celebrate his marriage without your official presence. Like royal personages, he will put out placards to invite one hundred and twenty thousand persons to his wedding. Will it be a gay one? I can not say. I conceived this child in joy, and, please Heaven, I may be delivered of it without pain. . . . But hitherto I have not been fortunate with it. I shall require absolution and assistance of a very spiritual nature (*des secours très-spirituels*) at the critical moment; I expect them from you and another ecclesiastic in a very dark corner. *Venite, abbati, maledicemus de auctore*; but, above all, let us laugh if I am unfortunate. I only consent to be so on these terms. I greet, honor, and love you.

BEAUMARCHAIS."

tinue to dazzle and deceive them until the year 1802? What would he say if, in 1855, he saw people persist in allowing themselves to be dazzled and deceived by these villainous rhapsodies, which, when well played, continue to attract the public, not only in France, but every where?

The comedy of Beaumarchais, though its general importance in a political point of view is lost, still even in this respect preserves a certain reality, while to well-informed men it remains a curious monument of a peculiar state of affairs which will perhaps never reappear in France—that of a government with abuses enough to supply materials in plenty for a satirical comedy, and at the same time too self-confident or too weak to prevent an audacious and obstinate author from putting it on the stage. The Aristophanic character of “The Marriage of Figaro,” which incontestably contributes to its originality, although it no longer presents the dangers it formerly did, does not fail to raise many and often unexpected adversaries. Among these are many honest citizens, who would certainly be furious if by a stroke with a wand some magician one fine morning restored the ancient *régime* to them, with its colonels of seven years of age, its Maupeou Parliament, its *lettres de cachet*, its thousand unjust privileges, and its thousand abuses.

“The Marriage of Figaro” had been represented sixty-eight times successively, with unparalleled success. The first time it was played the receipts amounted to 6511 livres; the sixty-eighth time they were 5483 livres. In eight months, from April 27, 1784, to January 10, 1785, the piece had brought the Comédie Française (without counting the fiftieth representation, which was, at Beaumarchais’ suggestion, given for the benefit of the poor) the gross sum of 346,197 livres, from which, after all expenses had been deducted, a clear profit of 293,755 livres was left for the actors, minus Beaumarchais’ share as author, which was valued at 41,499 livres. We see from this that if “The Marriage of Figaro” was open to criticism as a work of art, it was of undeniable value as a means of obtaining money. It is true that the piece was got up with the greatest care, and acted to perfection.

All the principal parts were intrusted to actors of the first

merit. Mademoiselle Sainval, who was the tragic actress then in vogue, at the urgent request of Beaumarchais, had accepted the part of Countess Almaviva, in which she displayed a talent which was the more striking from being unexpected. Mademoiselle Contat enchanted the public in the character of Susanna by her grace, the refinement of her acting, and the charms of her appearance and voice. A very young and very pretty actress, who was soon after carried off by death in her eighteenth year—Mademoiselle Olivier, whose talent, says a contemporary, was as *naïve* and fresh as her face—lent her *naïveté* and her freshness to the somewhat warm part of Cherubino. Molé acted the part of Count Almaviva with the elegance and dignity which distinguished him. Dazincourt represented Figaro with all his wit, and relieved the character from any appearance of vulgarity. Old Prévile, who was not less successful in the character of Brid'oison, had given it up after a few days to Dugazon, who interpreted it with more power and equal intelligence. Desessarts, with his rich humor, gave relief to the character of Bartholo, which is thrown somewhat into the background. The secondary parts of Basil and Antonio were equally well played by Vanhove and Bellemont; finally, through a singular caprice, a somewhat celebrated tragedian, Larive, not wishing tragedy to be represented in the piece by Mademoiselle Sainval alone, asked for the insignificant little part of Grippe-soleil.

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" devoted all it produced to works of charity.

"I propose," said he, in a letter to the "Journal de Paris," August 12, 1784, "I propose to form a benevolent institution, to which every woman known to be poor may, on being recommended by the curate of her parish, come with her child in her arms, and say, 'I am a mother, and have a child to nurse; I used to gain twenty sous a day; my child costs me twelve.' Twenty sous a day make thirty francs a month: we might give this woman nine francs in charity, which, with the nine francs that the husband would no longer have to pay to a stranger, would leave them eighteen francs in pocket. The mother will not have much good will if she can not gain eight sous per day while suckling her child, and thus she gets the thirty livres again.

"At the risk of again being looked upon as a vain man, I will de-

vote all my 'Figaro' to this purpose ; it is money which belongs to me, which I have gained by my labor in spite of torrents of printed and written abuse. Now, when the actors have received 200,000 francs, my nurses will have 28,000 ; with the 30,000 from my friends, I shall have a whole regiment of children fattening upon the maternal milk. All this compensates for a great many insults."

The Comédie-Française, not willing to be surpassed in zeal by Beaumarchais, consented to devote the entire receipts of the fiftieth representation to the benefit of the institution for poor nursing mothers.

The institution for the benefit of poor nursing mothers met with obstacles, which were probably occasioned by the enmity felt toward the man who wished to found it, and it was impossible to establish it in Paris ; but, as the idea was a good one, it was not abandoned. The Archbishop of Lyons, M. de Montazet, adopted it. He freely accepted the assistance and money of Beaumarchais ; and the Benevolent Maternal Institution, which still exists, I believe, in Lyons, had its origin in "The Marriage of Figaro." Beaumarchais was one of its most constant supporters. In 1790 he sent to this establishment a farther sum of 6000 francs.

While Beaumarchais was thus occupying public attention by the most various means,* his enemies, headed by Suard, worried him incessantly with anonymous articles in the "Journal de Paris."

At first the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" replied with his usual gayety ; at last, however, tired of the business, he wrote, March 6, 1785, a final letter, in which he assured the editors of the "Journal de Paris" that he should not answer the anonymous insults again ; and by way of explaining, in the most energetic manner, all the importance he attached

* He was accused especially of inventing out-of-the-way stories and circulating them in connection with his piece. The following anecdote was related as an invention of this kind : A young man, reduced to the last extremity of misery, wrote to Beaumarchais, begging the favor of being allowed to see "The Marriage of Figaro" before he committed suicide. Strange as it may appear, the fact was nevertheless true. The author of this letter was a young writer named Feydel, who in after years attained some celebrity. We must add that Beaumarchais hastened to visit the unhappy young man in his garret where he lived, that he procured him a situation, and gave him all the aid in his power.

to them, he employed this highly-colored, though somewhat carelessly expressed antithesis: "When I have had to conquer lions and tigers," said he, "in order to get a comedy acted, do you think that after its success you will reduce me to the level of a Dutch housemaid, to hunt every morning the *vile insect of the night*?"

As Suard was personally very small, he might have taken the last term of this not very delicate antithesis for himself. Unfortunately for Beaumarchais, who thought he had only Suard to deal with, the Count de Provence, although very stout, having, it appears, taken part in Suard's attacks, was much offended by this redoubtable antithesis, and complained to the king, his brother, of Beaumarchais' insolence. However, as he took care to conceal the part which had most offended him, and as he was very ingenious, he easily persuaded his brother that Beaumarchais' crime did not consist in speaking of the "vile insect of the night," but of having written the words "lions and tigers," which, according to him, *evidently* meant the king and queen.

To accuse any one of having dreamed of comparing Louis XVI. to a tiger, or even to a lion, was almost like accusing him of having attempted to carry off the towers of Notre Dame in his pocket. Beaumarchais had only introduced the tigers for the literary advantage of his antithesis, and in order to bring out the "vile insect of the night;" but Louis XVI.—the best of men, although subject to fits of hastiness, which were, however, generally limited to an abrupt manner of speaking—Louis XVI. was already irritated against Beaumarchais. The immense success of a comedy which had been played in some sort against his will, a success which made him uneasy as a king, and which shocked him as a Christian, rendered him disposed to listen to the most improbable accusations. The present one made him quite beside himself. Without leaving the card-table at which he was seated, he wrote—if the author of 'Souvenirs d'un Sexagénaire,' M. Arnault, is to be believed—on a seven of spades, in pencil, an order to arrest Beaumarchais immediately, and, adding insult to injury, which is never excusable in a sovereign, gave orders not to conduct him to an ordinary prison, but to one which covered at the

same time with ridicule and shame a man who was fifty-three years of age, that is to say, St. Lazare, where juvenile offenders were confined.

To treat like a young vagabond a man of Beaumarchais' age and celebrity, a man to whom important missions had been confided, who had been initiated into state society, who had been charged with most important operations, who was known to be at the head of a large house of business, and whose talents exercised a powerful influence on the public, was more than an injustice—it was one of the gravest faults; for it was making manifest to all eyes the pernicious influence which could be exercised at times by power uncontrolled by laws, even on the most good-natured of princes. This arbitrary act is, however, the only one with which Louis XVI. personally can be reproached.

Such is the frivolity of the Parisian public, that when it was known, on the morning of March 9, 1785, that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," in the midst of his triumph, had been imprisoned the previous evening, without any one knowing why, in company with the young thieves of St. Lazare, the fact seemed at first very amusing, and the laughter occasioned by it was almost universal. The next day people began to inquire the reason of this strange incarceration; and as the government could give none, and knew of none (for it was very awkward to confess that Beaumarchais was imprisoned because they were inclined to believe that he had intended to compare Louis XVI. to a tiger), the public became unruly, and began to murmur. The following day the murmurs became loud. "Every one," says Arnault, "felt in danger, not only as regarded his liberty, but also as regarded his personal dignity." On the fourth day there was a general movement of indignation, particularly among the young men, and the excitement was so great that Arnault, although then in the service of the Count de Provence, informs us that he could not resist writing one of the most audacious odes against this act of tyranny.* At last, on the fifth day, Beaumarchais was

* A sheet of "Nouvelles à la main," which lies before me, after giving a detailed account of the arrest and imprisonment of Beaumarchais, winds up with a sentence which seems to be the expression of the public feel-

forced, almost against his will, to leave the prison; for in his resentment for the shameful iniquity of which he was a victim, he wished to remain in prison until his crime was specified and his judges appointed. The unpublished Memorial which he addressed from St. Lazare to the king is curious, as exhibiting a situation equally embarrassing for Louis XVI. and for Beaumarchais. The lieutenant of police had, without doubt, given the prisoner some idea of the true cause of the king's anger; but how was the subject to be broached? How was he to excuse himself in the eyes of the king for having likened him to a tiger? "In comparing," says Beaumarchais, "the great obstacles I had to overcome in order to get a poor comedy played, with the repeated attacks which one looks down upon after a success, I took the two extremes in the scale of comparison, and in the same manner that I might have said, 'After having fought with giants, am I to march against pigmies;' or have employed any other illustration, I said But if any one should persist in thinking there can exist any being in France so utterly mad as to wish to offend the king, in a letter examined by the censor and published in a newspaper, have I as yet given any signs of such a madness, that people should hazard such an accusation against me without proof?"

A few days of reflection, doubtless, made the king understand that he could not decently admit the intention attributed to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" to him, and yielding to those feelings of justice and kindness which were so natural to him, after having in a manner begged Beaumarchais to leave the prison, he took a pleasure in doing all he could to compensate him in every way for his shameful detention, which had lasted five days. Grimm states that nearly all the ministers were at the representation of "Figaro," which took place on Beaumarchais' leaving prison, and which met with a most brilliant reception. They had the slight annoyance of hearing the following phrase in the famous monologue applauded most energetically: "Not being able to degrade intellect, they avenge themselves by persecuting it." M. de Ca-
ving: "People are inquiring," says the anonymous writer, "whether any one can be sure of sleeping to-night in his own bed."

lonne wrote to Beaumarchais to say that the king considered he had justified himself, and would be happy to take every opportunity of testifying his good-will toward him. Louis XVI. did so soon afterward, in a most noble manner, and one most worthy of a sovereign who felt he had been in the wrong. "The Barber of Seville," says Grimm, "was acted in the little theatre of Trianon, before the queen's private party, and the author was honored by an invitation to be present at the representation. The queen herself took the part of Rosina; the Count of Artois that of Figaro; M. de Vaudreuil that of Count Almaviva, &c." Certainly no more delicate flattering reparation could have been made to Beaumarchais for the insult he had received.

To these delicate reparations were added more substantial proofs of the king's good-will. Since 1779 he had been trying to obtain from the government an indemnity for his fleet of merchant vessels, which had been sacrificed to the military operations of Admiral d'Estaing. He had received in succession 905,000 francs at one period, and at another, and three months before the first representation of "The Marriage of Figaro," 570,625 livres, with a letter from M. de Calonne, announcing that his further demands would be decided upon by a committee of shipowners. This further claim, fixed some time after Beaumarchais' imprisonment in St. Lazare by an order of the king, dated February 12, 1786, at the sum of 800,000 livres—which, added to the two preceding sums, formed a total of 2,275,625 livres—Beaumarchais received.

Notwithstanding all the reparation which the king made to Beaumarchais, this public act, not only of severity, but of contempt, performed in a moment of blind anger, had a lamentable effect on the moral position of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" in the eyes of the public. He had been seen, for the first time, to submit to an insult, and compelled to remain silent, on account of the rank of the offender; his enemies were encouraged by this to attack him, and soon his star, which was beginning to fall, brought him into conflict with a man who was not less bold, and who was, at the same time, younger and more redoubtable than himself.

Two clever engineers, the brothers Perier, had undertaken

to distribute the water of the Seine through every quarter of Paris, in imitation of what had long been the system in London, by establishing on the heights of Chaillot the fire-engine which is at work there to the present day. They had applied to Beaumarchais, who, being always ready to undertake useful enterprises which were at the same time likely to be profitable, had provided them with funds, and had helped them to organize, under the title of "The Paris Water Company," a society, of which he was one of the principal shareholders and one of the directors. The shares, which had at first fallen below par, went up rapidly and considerably in 1785. Several bankers, who had risked a great deal of money in speculating for the fall, had a very great interest in checking and reversing this movement. Mirabeau was then in Paris, having just left the prisons where he had spent so much of his tempestuous youth; he was, at the time, only known by his work on *lettres de cachet*, and his notorious lawsuits and love-affairs. Poor, and longing to gratify a thousand luxurious tastes, he wandered through society, tottering as it was, *sicut leo rugiens quærens quem devoret*, or, if the reader prefer it, like a knight errant in search of adventures and combats. Intimate with the financiers Panchaud and Clavière, who lent him money, and who were especially annoyed by the rise in the shares of the water company, and supplied by them with information more or less correct, he commenced a campaign against the company of the brothers Périer in a flaming pamphlet, in which he undertook to open the eyes of the nation as to its true interests, and to prove to them *patriotically* that the fire-engine at Chaillot was a detestable undertaking.

As shareholder and administrator, Beaumarchais had also a *patriotic* interest in proving the contrary. It must be observed that his position was clearer than that of his adversary, as he defended his own speculation, and a society which was undisputably useful. To Mirabeau's pamphlet he answered by one in which, contrary to his custom, he was perfectly calm and moderate, and only occupied himself in contradicting his adversary. Notwithstanding, as it is very difficult to act contrary to one's nature, he introduced a pun which was not in the very best taste. Comparing Mirabeau's pamphlet to the "Phil-

ippics," he called them "Mirabelles," and, under an appearance of courtesy, insinuated doubts as to the motives, more or less interested, which had guided the pen of the friend of Panchaud and Clavière. Nothing more was wanting to rouse a Hercules who longed for wounds and scars. The answer soon appeared. Mirabeau replied in a second pamphlet, in which, almost setting aside the Paris Water Company, he attacked the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" ferociously, spoke against his whole life, and abused him dreadfully in the name of morality and public order. When Mirabeau, the ravisher of women, defends morality against Beaumarchais; when Mirabeau, who, in the dungeon of Vincennes, wrote and sold anonymously the most vile things,* reproaches Beaumarchais with the licentiousness of his manners; when Mirabeau, the future tribune who was to invoke the Gracchi and Marius, calls Beaumarchais to account for his attacks against the orders of the state, he always appears to me amusing rather than impressive.

"The Count de Mirabeau," says Gudin, "lived almost entirely by what he borrowed: he came to see Beaumarchais; they only knew one another by reputation; the conversation between them was lively, animated, and witty. At last the count, with the levity customary with the borrowers of quality, asked Beaumarchais to lend him a sum of *twelve thousand francs*. Beaumarchais refused with that original gayety which distinguished him. 'But you could easily lend me that amount,' said the count. 'Without doubt,' replied Beaumarchais; 'but, Monsieur le Comte, as I should have to break off with you when the day of payment arrived, I would rather do so at once; I gain twelve thousand francs by it.'"

After Mirabeau's second pamphlet an answer was expected from Beaumarchais. To the great surprise of the public, the latter remained silent. Whether he considered the match was

* We are not alluding to the Vincennes correspondence, which does not deserve to be spoken of in such a manner—and which, besides, was not published by Mirabeau—but of several other cynical works, such as the "Erotika Biblion," "My Conversion," &c., which Mirabeau wrote in prison to procure money, and which, by some strange tolerance, the police assisted him to sell.

not equal, and that his antagonist was too strong for him, or had too little to lose, or whether he felt that need of rest which age brings to all, even the most warlike, he determined to remain silent. Did he act prudently? That is doubtful; for a new adversary will be shortly seen to take advantage of this sign of prudence in order to attack Beaumarchais in his turn with unequalled fury.

Four years had passed over this quarrel. Mirabeau had become the great orator and the great statesman of the Constituent Assembly, when one fine day in 1790, fatigued in his turn with the storms of life, he wrote to Beaumarchais the following letter:

"As my writing can not displease you, sir, when it is accompanied by behavior which you will not disapprove of, I have determined to address myself to you in a direct manner, rather than through intermediaries, in order to be enlightened upon a point which regards you.

"Having almost reached that age, and, above all, that mental disposition in which I also wish to think only of my books and my garden, I had, in looking over the national estates, cast my eyes upon the 'Minims' in the Wood of Vincennes; I hear that your thoughts are turned in that direction; it is even said that you have made the highest bid; there can be no doubt that if you desire this pretty residence, you will give much more for it than I should, because you are much more able to do so; and that being settled, I should think it very disobliging of me to send up the price of a thing to which I should no longer be able to aspire. Have the kindness, then, to tell me if I have been correctly informed, if you are very anxious to make this purchase, and from that moment I withdraw my offers; if, on the contrary, you have only a slight inclination to possess it, or merely a desire to encourage these sales for the good of the state, reserving to yourself to get rid, at a subsequent period, of an estate which is probably too near your present beautiful habitation for you to intend to make it your country house, I am persuaded you will behave to me as I do to you, and that you will not compete to send up the purchase.

"I have the honor to be most sincerely, sir, &c.,

"MIRABEAU THE ELDER.

"September 17, 1790."

Here is Beaumarchais' answer:

"I am about to reply to your letter, sir, with frankness and free-

dom. I have long been seeking an opportunity of revenging myself on you ; you now offer it to me yourself, and I accept it with joy.

"All the motives you mention did influence me in wishing to make the purchase. Another more powerful one was added to them ; and although it may appear strange, it was nevertheless the one which decided me. At the age of twelve, when about to make my first communion (you laugh ?) I was taken to the 'Minims ;' a large picture of the 'Last Judgment,' which was in their vestry, made such an impression on my mind, that I returned to see it very often. An old monk, of much wit, thereupon undertook to tear me away from the world. He gave me a sermon, every time I saw him, on the large picture, accompanying his sermon with refreshments. I had become very fond of his retreat and his moral lessons, and I went there every holiday. Since this time I have always taken a pleasure in visiting this cloister, and as soon as the estates of our poor shorn ones were offered for sale, I gave directions for outbidding every one for this one. So many motives combined make this acquisition dear to me ; but my vengeance is still more so, and I am no longer so good-natured as I was in my childhood. You desire my cloister ; I give it up to you, and resign all claims upon it, too happy to place my enemy at last between four walls. I am the only person who could do it, now that there are no more Bastilles.

"If in your anger you are still sufficiently generous not to interfere with the salvation of my soul, reserve for me, sir, the great picture of the 'Last Judgment.' My last judgment upon it is, that it is a very fine piece, and made to honor my chapel. You will thus have your revenge on me, as I have my revenge on you. If you have need of good information, or even of my assistance, to facilitate your purchase, speak, and I will do whatever you wish in the matter ; for if, sir, I am the most implacable of all your enemies, my friends say laughingly that I am the best of all ill-natured men.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

The thanks of Mirabeau were not long forthcoming :

"I must have been beside myself with joy yesterday, as I in fact was, sir, not to have answered your kind letter immediately. The candor of the age you recall is shown in it no less than its gayety and ingenuity ; and never did more engaging form accompany kinder conduct. Yes, certainly, the picture which has remained so vividly impressed on your imagination in the course of a life which must necessarily have somewhat distracted your attention from the 'Last Judgment,' is yours, if I become the owner of this cloister ; and to my ambition in this respect is added a prayer—it is that you will

come yourself to seek your souvenir of the vestry, and admit that no faults are inexpiable and no anger eternal.

"MIRABEAU THE ELDER.

"September 19, 1790."

A kind letter from Beaumarchais terminates this correspondence:

"I am more touched, sir, with your letter than I dare confess. Allow me to send you the good man whom I had intrusted with the settlement of this affair. Hé was formerly one of the brokers of the municipality; he will explain to you what value your purchase possesses, and what you can do with it. This will enable you to judge, if you do not already know, to what amount you can bid.

"Since my badinage did not displease you, receive now my most sincere assurance that the past has been totally forgotten. Turn my old vestry into a dining-room, and I will accept in it with joy a civic and frugal repast. Thanks to the Revolution, no one feels humiliated now at offering them of such a kind, and we have all become rich from the diminution it has caused in vain expenses, which made us poor without giving us any real pleasure. Have good workmen, and let them be good enough to finish their work quickly. It will certainly be excellent if it be only done with rapidity.

"Receive the salutations of the Cultivator."

Thus time appeases the most burning animosities. This project of seeking repose in the country was one of the chimeras with which Mirabeau nursed his imagination in his hours of lassitude: it had no result; the man of battles was to die in the breach; but it appeared to us that this pacific correspondence, in which each of the two former enemies exhibits himself in his true aspect, possessed more sincerity, and consequently more interest than their quarrel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Another Lawsuit. — Exercise of Marital Authority. — A complaisant Husband. — Bergasse and his Memorials. — Verdict for Beaumarchais.

IN his dispute with Mirabeau on the subject of the Paris Water Company, Beaumarchais had caused the public to look upon him as a man whose strength was beginning to fail. This was encouraging for those who might feel anxious to

make a reputation for themselves at the expense of his, and he was not long before he found himself assailed by a new adversary. In February, 1787, when he was occupying himself with the opera of "Tarare," of which we shall speak further on, a very large number of copies were circulated in Paris of a somewhat voluminous and very virulent pamphlet, entitled "Memorial on the Question of Adultery, Seduction, and Defamation on the part of le Sieur Kornman, against la Dame Kornman, his wife, le Sieur Daudet de Jossan, le Sieur Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, and M. Lenoir, councilor of state, formerly lieutenant-general of police." This Memorial, in a form which was no longer in use, printed without the printer's name, and containing an accusation addressed to the public and not to any court of justice, was simply signed Kornman; but the style gave evidence of a pen more skilled than that of an Alsatian banker. As the affair in question had an immense celebrity, in consequence of the circumstances and the persons who were attacked, we must first explain by what *tour de force* an advocate who was then obscure, but thirsting for celebrity, had been able to involve Beaumarchais in an action for adultery, with which he had nothing whatever to do, and which had been commenced six years before.

- In October, 1781, the author of "The Barber of Seville," when dining with the Prince de Nassau-Siegen, had been warmly solicited by the Prince and Princess to interest himself in the fate of a young woman, whom her husband had kept for six months shut up in a house of detention, in virtue of a *lettre de cachet*, and to unite his exertions to those they were making themselves in her favor. Rendered prudent by experience, Beaumarchais, before mixing himself up in so delicate an affair, asked for all possible particulars. A touching petition, which this young woman wrote from her prison to the President of the Parliament, was shown to him. She was a foreigner, born in Switzerland, without father or mother, and had been married at the age of fifteen to an Alsatian banker, to whom she brought a portion of 360,000 francs. She had two children, and was *enceinte* with a third. The affairs of her husband were in a bad condition. She had wished to preserve her portion for the sake of her children, and her husband

had had her imprisoned through a *lettre de cachet* as an adulteress. She met the accusation with a feeble denial, and it appears that it was really well founded; but she claimed the right of defending her fortune and honor before a court of justice, and asked not to be condemned to perish from suffering by having to give birth to her child in a place where mad women and prostitutes were shut up. In order to make Beaumarchais completely decided, they moreover showed him letters written by the husband to the man he accused of having seduced his wife, and introduced the seducer to him; he was an elegant, witty young man, of light morals, named Daudet de Jossan, who was rather intimate with the Prince and Princess of Nassau, and who was grandson of Adrienne Lecouvreur and Marshal Saxe.*

Daudet, through the patronage of the last minister of war, the Prince de Montbarey, had obtained the place, then an important one, of Syndic-royal, attached to the town of Strasburg. As this position gave him a certain influence in Alsace, Kornman had received him at his house in Paris. He had fallen in love with Madame Kornman, the husband had resolved what to do under the circumstances, had made his wife's lover his friend, and had profited by his influence with the minister Montbarey, until the period when the retirement of this minister caused Daudet to lose his place and influence. The good-natured and complaisant husband suddenly became transformed into an Othello. Kornman's letters to his wife's lover, in fact, expressed a toleration so ignoble, that Beaumarchais hesitated no longer. He hastened to the ministers, and with that persevering activity which he exhibited in whatever he undertook, he soon obtained the revocation of the *lettre de cachet*, and an order from the king enjoining the lieutenant of police, M. Lenoir, to have his prisoner conducted to the house of a surgeon-accoucheur, where she could be at liberty to receive her men of business, and to discuss her interests, in connection with her husband. Thus the same man who just before had been unable to preserve himself personally from a

* The father of Daudet, director of the salt dépôt of the town of Strasburg, had married Francoise-Catharine-Ursule Lecouvreur, natural daughter of the celebrated tragic actress and Marshal Saxe.

most arbitrary and insulting act of authority, had sometimes more power than a prince when the liberty of another person had to be obtained. This is another proof of that social discordance in all things which was preparing the way for the Revolution, and which we have already called attention to several times in the course of this work. However this may be, Kornman, seeing that his wife was escaping his power, tried to effect a reconciliation with her; five years were passed in abortive attempts to make up the differences, and in commencing lawsuits for a separation. In the interval, the commercial affairs of the banker became worse and worse; he was obliged to suspend his payments, and his wife, to whom Beaumarchais, as a consequence of the first service he had rendered her, could no longer refuse advice, had to commence law proceedings against him in order to preserve her dowry.

Things were in this position when Kornman happened to form the acquaintance of the young advocate Bergasse, who was still unknown, or, rather, known only by the extreme enthusiasm which he had exhibited in some pamphlets in favor of the magnetic experiments of Mesmer. Whether Bergasse really put faith in the more or less fantastic stories which Kornman told him, whether he perceived a fair opportunity for bringing himself out with advantage, or whether, in fine, he was induced by these two motives together, it is certain that it was he who determined the Alsacian banker to confide to the public the details which one generally likes to keep secret. It was at the instigation of the impetuous Bergasse that Kornman decided to let the affair make as much noise as possible, including in the same denunciation his wife and her presumed accomplice, Daudet de Jossan; the lieutenant-general of police, whom Kornman also suspected, rightly or wrongly, of having been his wife's lover, and who, having just given up his place, presented the advantage of being in a position to be attacked usefully and without danger; the Prince of Nassau even, whom Bergasse was to attack in a second "Memorial;" and finally, but above all, Beaumarchais, the "fearful," the "villainous" Beaumarchais, who was put forward as the working hinge of the most abominable plot against all laws, human and divine.

Such was the object of the first Memorial, published in Kornman's name, written by Bergasse, and circulated by thousands throughout Paris. This Memorial, pompous from one end to another, often exaggerated and incorrect, presents, nevertheless, some sufficiently brilliant pages; but as regards logic, reason, and law, it really does not bear examination. It is really a mass of confusion. What do we find in it? A husband who narrates, or rather an advocate who makes a husband relate, in an emphatic style, the wrongs he imputes to his wife, with an epigraph in Latin verse, taken from Claudian's poem against Ruffinus, an epigraph which was specially directed against Beaumarchais, although he had nothing whatever to do with the principal fact, namely, the adultery of Madame Kornman. One thing, which for the rest would tend to indicate a certain good faith on the part of Bergasse, at all events, at the commencement of the affair, is, that in his perpetual excitement he forgets every instant that he is clothing in an imposing style details which reflect but little honor on his client. He might, for example, dispense with showing us that this husband for a year carries his good-nature to the extent of the most shameful tolerance, after which he has his wife confined as soon as any question arises of a division of property. He might dispense with making this husband utter the *naïve* confession, that if he waited six years before making the disclosure public, he did so because the lieutenant of police, whom he accuses of being one of his wife's lovers, *had promised him a place in the Indies*. Finally, is it not singular that a husband, after having dragged his wife publicly through the mud, after having accused her not only of very grave and very frequent irregularities, but also of swindling, and even of being an accomplice in some affair connected with a murder, which was a perfect romance, should arrive finally at the conclusion that his wife and her portion should be left to him—the portion, apparently, because it was a good thing to have, the wife because, says this amiable husband, she has *erred rather than sinned*, and because he desires *she may live surrounded by the esteem which she may yet deserve?* And all this to lead up to an invocation of all the rigor of the law, not only upon the head of the suborner or suborners, which would have been

natural enough, at all events, on the part of any other husband, but upon the head of Beaumarchais, against whom no other precise fact is alleged than that of having helped to obtain from the ministers the revocation of a *lettre de cachet* in favor of a woman who was on the point of being brought to bed in a house of detention. In order to have every thing logical, moreover, in the Memorials of Bergasse, we find in them the most ardent declamations against *lettres de cachet*.

Excited by the example of Mirabeau, Bergasse leaves him far behind in the violence of language. All the most insulting expressions and withering imputations which rage can inspire are heaped upon Beaumarchais. And as if it were not enough to call him "*a man whose sacrilegious existence attests in so disgraceful and flagrant a manner the degree of profound depravity to which we have arrived,*" in another Memorial this advocate, speaking in his own name to Beaumarchais, whom he does not know, whom he has never seen—" *Malheureux tu sues le crime !*"* At an ordinary period and to an impartial public, Beaumarchais' answer to these invectives would have appeared crushing, for he contented himself with opposing, as he said, to Kornman-Bergasse, Kornman himself; that is to say, that to this husband, so pompous with his sensitiveness, his indignation, and his virtue—to this husband, who, with the pen of Bergasse, enlarged with so much facility on the sacredness of the conjugal tie, he opposed the real husband, the husband who wrote—during the very year in which his wife's relations with Daudet had filled him with indignation in his *Memorial*—letters in which he made of this suborner his friend, his confidant, his patron with the ministers, the architect of his fortune, the friend and habitual companion of his wife. He showed that Kornman deserved to be placed in the very embarrassing dilemma which was subsequently put to him at the hearing by Daudet's advocate: "Either you are the

* We have stated above that Beaumarchais' unaccustomed prudence in his dispute with Mirabeau had encouraged Bergasse. The latter, in fact, confesses it ingenuously when he speaks of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" as a man "who, when dragged publicly through the mud by a famous writer whom he had the impudence to insult, did not dare to raise his head before him, and by his *guilty silence* justified the opprobrium with which he was covered."

most atrocious calumniator, or you are the vilest of husbands; you must choose between the two."

As for Beaumarchais, after having thus exposed the morality of the plaintiff in its true light, it was not difficult for him to demonstrate, in the most incontrovertible manner, that there were no reasonable grounds for mixing him up in this accusation of adultery. Unhappily for him, the public cared very little about who was right or wrong upon the main question, which was insignificant enough in itself, but only troubled itself as to who would conquer in this war to the death, which a new adversary was declaring against Beaumarchais; for after the noise of the first Memorial, Bergasse, desirous of appearing on the stage, and understanding, moreover, that it was scarcely becoming to avoid the responsibility of his attacks any longer by borrowing the name of Kornman, when every one knew that the Memorial was his own, had positively declared himself to be the author; and Beaumarchais having cited him, as well as Kornman, before the Parliament for defamation, Bergasse had to continue the dispute both in the name of Kornman and his own. Now here he possessed several advantages over Beaumarchais. He had yet neither enemies nor enviers; with a bilious temperament and a very ardent imagination, he had naturally a certain emphatic style, which was proof against the irony of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," and the violence of his periods, which were often forced, but always sonorous, looked like the earnestness resulting from conviction. He was no less skillful than violent; for, profiting by circumstances—by the quarrels between the ministry and the Parliament, which caused the administration of justice to be suspended, and made his lawsuit drag over nearly two years, he managed to take exactly the same part that Beaumarchais had formerly taken at the time of the Goëzman lawsuit, and to connect with this dispute all the preoccupations of the day. The groundwork of the affair thus disappeared beneath the accessories, and soon, in the Memorials of Bergasse, the chief subjects were not M. and Madame Kornman, but the exile of the Parliament and the villainy of Beaumarchais, whom he accused of being sold to the ministers; the liberty of the press, the States-General,

and the "villainy" of Beaumarchais, who was declared to be the enemy of their rights. All the idlers naturally took part in the contest, which is one of the great events of the epoch. During the two years which it lasted, nearly four hundred pamphlets were published on the subject, Bergasse introducing into them all the names, more or less unpopular, which he found ready to his pen, and each person mentioned publishing in his turn answers and explanations. Beaumarchais only wrote three Memorials during the Kornman lawsuit; they are incontestably much weaker than those he wrote against Goëzman and others. He was in this case so perfectly in the right as to the main questions, that he did not know how to defend himself against the declamatory generalities under which it was sought to crush him. It was in vain that his friends advised him to avoid the forms of satire, which would not answer, inasmuch as Bergasse had managed to make of the affair a great question of public morality, in which he put himself forward as the defender of virtue against a "mass of perverted men:" as public opinion was disposed to accept him in that character, he ought to be deprived of it with seriousness, and met with a violence equal to his own; but Beaumarchais was beginning to grow old; he had habits of intellect which it was now impossible for him to give up. Not satisfied with proving that in all this there was nothing to reproach him with, which was very true, he allowed himself to make jokes about Kornman, which spoiled his position, and laid him open to the austere philippics of Bergasse.

On his side, Bergasse, who writes modestly, "I will carry human eloquence as far as it can go," professes singular opinions as to the right, which, according to his idea, every person enjoyed of attacking the reputation of a celebrated man, and overwhelming him with insults. Let us hear him: "I have, you say, merely written facts which are false; I have, then, incurred all the penalties attached to calumny. Well! even on this supposition (evidently false), M. Kornman would have deceived me; you would have a right to attack him, and to demand satisfaction for his imposture; but I, whose intentions have been so pure—whose conduct has been so frank—whose aim has been so worthy of praise—I shall always be above

your reach. . . . But, you say, we prosecute you, not because you wrote the Memorials of M. Kornman, but because you have represented us in them under the most odious features. . . . That is to say," cries Bergasse, "that you wish to punish me for being myself and not any one else; for not having written with your faculties, but with my own. . . ." And as the faculties of Bergasse are essentially inclined toward virulence, after having, during two years, accumulated every insult on Beaumarchais, on M. Lenoir, and on the Prince of Nassau, at the last hearing he administers to them the following peroration: "Let these perverted men learn that I shall never cease pursuing them; that as long as they remain unpunished, I shall not be silent; that I must be sacrificed at their feet, or they must fall at mine. The altar of justice is at this moment to me the altar of vengeance, and upon this altar—*henceforth fatal*—I swear that there shall never be peace between us; that I will never leave them; that I will rest no more; that I will attach myself to them like remorse to the guilty conscience. And you, who preside over this august tribunal—you, the friend of morals and laws—you, in whom we all admire, &c., &c., *receive my oaths*." The numerous admirers of Bergasse considered this sublime.

The Parliament accepted the oaths of this impetuous advocate at what they were worth; and though he had carefully and incessantly mixed up the flattery of his judges with invectives against the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," a decree of April 2d, 1789, suppressing his Memorials as *false, insulting, and calumnious*, condemned him to pay Beaumarchais a thousand livres damages, and warned him against repeating the offense *under pain of exemplary punishment*. Kornman was sentenced to the same penalties, and, moreover, in consideration of the proofs of his guilty connivance, declared incapacitated for sustaining his accusation of adultery against his wife and Daudet de Jossan.

Parliament must have had a certain amount of courage to give this decision, for the result of this prolonged contest had been to raise against Beaumarchais a universal outcry. Attacked every day in anonymous letters of the most furious description, assaulted once even in the street, he could no lon-

ger go out in the evening without being armed and accompanied. Bergasse, on the contrary, had for the moment become the idol of the public. This multitude, which overflowed the large hall of the Parliament—this multitude, which, in the time of the Goëzman lawsuit, bore Beaumarchais in triumph, received the news of his victory with murmurs, reserving all its sympathies and all its admiration for his adversary. Nevertheless, in this affair his position was incontestably better, both morally and legally, than in the affair with Goëzman; but as he had, perhaps, formerly somewhat abused the favor of public opinion, Providence doubtless wished that he should feel all the bitterness of its injustice.* On the same day the friends of Bergasse said that his adversary had bought over the Parliament. He had so far bought it over that I can not prevent myself from here transcribing an interesting detail, which I find among my papers, and which proves that the true Parliament had nothing in common as to the matter of integrity with the Maupeou Parliament.

In this celebrated action, in which the five or six first ad-

* The injustice continued even after Beaumarchais' death. Bergasse, having had the advantage of surviving him a long time (he lived until 1832), profited by the advantages of the situation, and although his Memorials were very justly declared false and calumnious by magistrates who certainly had no predilection for the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," three of them have been inserted in a rather well-known collection, published under the title of the "French Bar." The editors of this collection suppressed Beaumarchais' replies, because, say they, "they are merely judicial pleadings of very mediocre quality." That is possible, but it does not render the exclusive publication of Bergasse's very black calumnies the more just. The editors, to console their consciences, add that Bergasse gives *accurately*, in his memorials, the contents of Beaumarchais' answers. Nothing in the world can be more inaccurate than this assertion. One thing, on the contrary, which distinguished Bergasse's Memorials is his ingenious silence with regard to the characteristic facts of the case, and in the manner in which he perpetually, and sometimes eloquently, diverges to facts which are foreign to the question, so that the nature of the lawsuit is as completely misrepresented as that of Beaumarchais himself. Those who may wish to gain a better knowledge of both will do well to consult, in addition to Beaumarchais' answers, the less known collection by Mejan, entitled "Causes Célèbres," in which the one in question is analyzed with sufficient accuracy.

vocates of Paris took part, a young barrister, twenty-nine years of age, Dambray, who was afterward Count Dambray, and Chancellor of France under the Restoration, spoke for the first time as advocate-general. After the pleadings at the final hearing, Dambray had to give his conclusions, and to separate the case from all the complicated balderdash with which it had been overloaded. Obligated to speak for several hours, and stifled by the heat, the young advocate-general had fainted twice; after each fainting-fit, he resumed his argument where he had left it off with as much presence of mind as if it had not been interrupted, and pursued it with an eloquence which was full of power and lucidity. Without troubling himself about the sudden popularity of Bergasse, or the unpopularity of Beaumarchais, he had arrived at a just conclusion, and in a certain way had dictated to the conscience of the judges the judgment which had just been pronounced.

Several days after this judgment Beaumarchais felt anxious to satisfy a feeling of gratitude toward Dambray, and not knowing exactly how to act so as to avoid wounding his susceptibility, he had a box left at his porter's lodge containing a superb cameo and the following anonymous letter, which was not in his own handwriting:

EXECUTION OF A LEGACY.

"This antique portrait of Cicero, engraved on *péridot*, a fine stone of the first quality after the emerald, was the favorite ring which was always worn by M. d'Emery, the most celebrated antiquary of the eighteenth century. When he died he left it in trust to one of his friends upon condition that he would remit it to the most eloquent man he met: it belongs, then, incontestably to M. Dambray.

"The stone has not been repolished from a feeling of respect, and for fear of altering the perfect likeness of the ancient Cicero before presenting it to the modern."

The next day Beaumarchais had his box returned to him, with the following letter:

"A little box was remitted to me, sir, yesterday evening, containing a portrait of Cicero very artistically engraved on a fine stone *of the first quality after the emerald*, as I am informed in a letter which is far too obliging, and in which the writer carries flattery so far as to compare me to the Roman orator; I could only attribute to the enthusiasm of a suitor who had gained his action, and who did not

know me, a present which suits me in no respect. I examined my servants to find out the author, and as what I heard from my porter, who recognized your lackey, confirmed my first suspicions, I hasten, sir, to profit by the discovery to beg of you to take back a jewel which proper delicacy does not permit me to accept.

"Under whatever form a present be offered, it does not cease to be a present, and a magistrate ought never to receive one.

"I have the honor to be, sir, &c.,

DAMBRAY."

Beaumarchais replied by protesting that the present was not from him; but the young advocate-general, convinced of the contrary, persisted in his refusal. This is how Beaumarchais bought over the Parliament which had just decided against Bergasse. It is true, however, as has been said, that if he gained his action before the tribunal, he lost it this time before public opinion, and made the fortune of Bergasse, who, although declared to be a calumniator in a judicial decision, was indebted to this affair alone for a brilliant celebrity, and found himself elected at once to the Constituent Assembly, where his celebrity was not maintained.

La Harpe, while declaring himself indignant at the equally odious and absurd calumnies of which Beaumarchais was so often the object, is of opinion that he committed an unpardonable action when he allowed himself, three years after the lawsuit, to give the treacherous character in his drama of "The Guilty Mother" the Irish name of Begearrs, intended to recall that of Bergasse, but which, in fact, recalls it slightly enough; and the greater part of Beaumarchais' biographers have mechanically repeated this opinion of the celebrated critic. La Harpe, who introduced into the smallest of his literary quarrels such bitter and obstinate animosity, speaks of such matters now quite at his ease. What! a man to whom you have never done the least harm, whom you do not know, who does not know you, shall have outraged and calumniated you in the most atrocious manner for two years; he shall have excited the most ardent hostility against you, and you are inexcusable for transforming him into the villain of a melodrama under an Irish anagram! "In truth," says Arnault, with reason, on this subject, "the vengeance was less severe than the outrage which had provoked it. I knew," he adds, "Ber-

gasse and Beaumarchais : nothing could be more opposed than their dispositions. They were both eager for renown ; they obtained it in the first instance through writings published on the occasion of a lawsuit ; but Beaumarchais defended himself in his Memorials, which Bergasse attacked in his. Tormented by bile, Bergasse, though decidedly a good sort of man, was of the most morose disposition. No one, on the contrary, could be more gay than Beaumarchais, who was, whatever may be said, a very honorable man, and, as every one admitted, one of the most amiable that could be met with."

This impartial testimony of Arnault, writing forty years after the event, permits us at least to conclude that if, indeed, Bergasse was at bottom a good sort of man, he conducted himself in this case like an unjust and malicious one, which is not permitted even to the best sort of men. Without reason and without justice, through an ambition for renown, through violence of disposition, he carried his fury against Beaumarchais to the last extremes of invective and calumny ; he gave a cruel wound to his reputation, from which it never completely recovered ; and when the Revolution broke out, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who might have hoped to be received under the new *régime* with some favor, found the period of decadence and unpopularity opening before him.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Tarare."—Beaumarchais' House and Garden.—Napoleon and Beaumarchais' Daughter.—Mademoiselle Eugénie.—La Mère Coupable.

THE attacks of Bergasse, which obliged Beaumarchais to descend once more into the judicial arena, surprised him, as we have said, just when he was preparing the first representation of an opera. This work, from its singular title of "Tarare," and from the general opinion that something strange would proceed from the co-operation of Beaumarchais and Salieri, the principal pupil of Gluck, excited public curiosity in the most lively manner. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" still preserved the privilege of dividing public attention with the most important events of the day. "As soon

as it was known," says a journalist quoted in Grimm's "Correspondence,"* "that the rehearsal of 'Tarare' had commenced, all interest in the great men of the day, in ministerial changes, in the provincial assemblies, disappeared before this great phenomenon. 'Tarare' became the sole subject of all conversations; nowhere was any thing talked of but 'Tarare.'"

The first representation of "Tarare" took place June 8, 1787. "Never," says the journalist already quoted, "never before did any of our theatres see such a crowd as that which besieged all the avenues of the opera the day of the first representation of 'Tarare.' Barriers raised expressly for the purpose, and protected by a guard of four hundred men, scarcely sufficed to keep it in restraint." The reader sees that Beaumarchais' power of attracting the multitude had undergone no diminution; it was rather increased than otherwise by the noise of the fresh lawsuit in which he was engaged. This time the expectation of the public was somewhat deceived: "Tarare" excited much more surprise than admiration. Nevertheless, this work had more success than has been said, and it lived longer than is commonly supposed.

The name the author of "Tarare" borrowed from Hamilton; the rest of his fable was taken to a great extent from a tale translated from the Persian, and entitled "Sadak and Kalasrade;" but, as Beaumarchais was desirous of putting more *philosophy* into his opera than the Persian author, he started from a higher point. In a prologue of the most strange kind, he undertook to show the "Genius of the reproduction of beings or Nature," occupied in concert with the "Genius of Fire, which presides over the Sun, Nature's lover," in creating beings. These two genii manufacture in succession the different characters who figure in the opera. After hesitating between two shadows, before deciding which of them is to be king, the Genius of Fire "lays his hands upon them," makes one of them the "Emperor Atar, King of Ormus, despot of Asia," and the other an obscure soldier. This soldier, who is to be "Tarare," is intended to represent the triumph of virtue and intelligence over the gifts of birth and chance. He will

* *Vide* Grimm's "Correspondence," June, 1787. Letter from M. Pitra to one of his friends at Lyons on the opera of "Tarare."

find himself the object of Atar's tyranny, who takes his wife away from him, and wishes to kill him as a reward for the glory he has acquired in fighting for him; he will also burn to defeat the astute machinations of the chief of the Brahmins. He will surmount every obstacle by his courage, and will raise himself from the most obscure rank to the highest point in public favor. Like "Figaro," but much more virtuous and much more lively, and with a turban and sabre, he will defend his wife against the attempts of King Atar, "a man of fierce and unbridled passions," in the words of the programme. More liberally rewarded even than Figaro, Tarare will be forced by the people to ascend the throne in place of the ferocious Atar, who poisons himself, and all this in order to exhibit with additional force the moral of the poem, which is summed up in these four philosophical lines, which Nature and the Genius of Fire return at the end to sing, *majestically*, in Beaumarchais' words, but which they must have had some trouble in singing *melodiously*:

Mortel, qui que tu sois, prince, brahme, ou soldat,
 Homme, ta grandeur sur la terre
 N'appartient point à ton état,
 Elle est toute à ton caractère.*

As to the music, Beaumarchais said to his composer, "Write me music which will be subservient and not dominant, all its effects being made subordinate to the progress of my dialogue and the interest of my drama." Salieri wrote him music which was so subservient that it became insignificant. "The music of 'Tarare,'" says a contemporary critic, "will add nothing to the reputation of the author; it is generally considered very inferior to that of the 'Danaïdes.' The few songs which it contains are of the most obvious and commonplace description; the recitative is almost always insipid and fatiguing from its monotony. Some of the choruses are highly effective, and sometimes contain a melody which we regret not to find in the songs and dance music. Two or three *morceaux*, such

* Mortal, whoever thou art, prince, brahmin, or soldier,
 Man, thy greatness on the earth
 Does not belong to thy calling,
 It is all in thy disposition.

as that of Calpigi in the third act, are really the only agreeable things in the music of this opera."

And, nevertheless, this opera of "Tarare," with its poor music and more than mediocre poetry, possessed, from the originality of its construction, from its unexpected, rapid, and sudden scenic effects, from its combination of drama, comedy, fairy-tale, ballet, dancing, philosophy, and physics, a certain peculiar *ensemble* which did not fail to gain a hold on the public.

The 14th July, 1780, Beaumarchais was occupied in building in front of, and very near to the Bastille, as if in defiance of this stronghold, a superb and charming dwelling. He had bought from the city, in 1787, all that portion of land which now forms the left line of the boulevard which bears his name, as you approach by the Boulevard St. Martin, taking the line opposite the Rue du Pas de la Mule, and continuing it to the Place de la Bastille. It was a lengthened rectangular space of about one acre in extent, in which he proposed, like Sir Walter Scott, another literary builder,* "to exercise his creative power upon his mother Earth," and to build a house which should have no more resemblance to other houses than "The Marriage of Figaro" had to other comedies. He succeeded, but not without expending a great sum of money. The architect Lemoyne had at first given him a plan which amounted to three hundred thousand francs. This primitive plan led him, little by little, to an expenditure of *one million six hundred and sixty-three thousand francs*. Trust, then, to architects, especially when they have to do with an imaginative man like Beaumarchais, who desires, as he somewhere says, to build *a house*

* Beaumarchais and Sir Walter Scott would not have agreed with the witty Voltaire, who says, in one of his letters, "We great wits are not great builders, and we ground it on the verses of Horace :

'Ædificare casas, plaustello adjungere muros
Si quem delectet barbatum insania verset.'

"Monsieur de Gombaut and I have resolved not to build till the times return when the stones put themselves one on the other to the sound of the lyre. I do not know if Apollo was disgusted with this business, after being so badly paid for the walls of Troy; but it appears to me his favorites do not devote themselves to it, and that their genius leads them to other things than making large buildings."

that shall be cited, and who does not look too closely at the expensive consequences of each embellishment! When this celebrated house, of which it may be said *materiam superabat opus*, was bought up in 1818 for the public convenience, the municipality, which considers very little the artistic value of property, paid for this, to the heirs of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," five hundred thousand francs. In this it must be again acknowledged that Beaumarchais, so often decried for his successful speculations, was more an artist than a speculator.

Madame de Beaumarchais has preserved to us, in a letter to one of her friends, a conversation which seems almost stenographed, between the conqueror of Austerlitz and the daughter of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" upon the subject of this house, which during the Empire there was a talk of pulling down to lengthen the boulevard, but which was not pulled down until the Restoration. This dialogue took place in 1809, at a fête given to the Emperor by the city of Paris.

"It was not," Madame de Beaumarchais wrote, "a simple feeling of curiosity which induced my daughter to be at the fête; her desire was to speak to the Emperor, and to take advantage of the circumstance, if his majesty addressed her, to present to him a petition relative to our house, which had been threatened with being pulled down for three years, marked to be so since the preceding year, and yet whose fate remained uncertain. My daughter has succeeded; the Emperor spoke to her. Here is a part of the dialogue. 'What is your name?' 'I am the daughter of Beaumarchais.' 'Are you married?' 'To M. Delarne, one of the administrators of excise, and brother-in-law to General Mathieu Dumas.' 'Have you any children?' 'Two boys and one girl.' 'Did your father leave you his large fortune?' 'No, sire, the Revolution nearly ruined us.' 'Do you live in his beautiful house?' This was just the point gained. She seized the opportunity with address and wit, saying that was what she wished to call his majesty's attention to; that she and all her family were excessively injured by the state of things resulting from the project the government appeared to have adopted; that during the three years the pulling down of our house had been spoken of we had lost a great many of our lodgers; that we had thought it right to suspend all repairs, which caused great damage to the house, and great annoyance to the family, &c. To which the Emperor replied, 'Well, it shall be valued, and you shall be paid the amount;

but it cost an immense sum, and we do not pay for follies,' &c. During the whole time my daughter was speaking, as it were in an under tone, the Emperor leaned down and had his head close to the ivory shoulder of the lady, who finished by giving the petition which she had provided herself with at all risks. What gives us great pleasure is, that we know now what to expect, and that my children will act in accordance."

If, in point of speculation, Beaumarchais, as Napoleon said, committed a *folly*, he succeeded in building a house that persons went to see as a curiosity. In coming by the boulevard, you saw on the left, at the end of the Rue du Pas de la Mule, a wall surmounted by a terrace planted with trees, in the style of the terrace by the side of the water in the garden of the Tuileries. At the extremity of this terrace appeared in the midst of trees a temple of a round form, surmounted with a dome; upon the dome a little terrestrial globe, bearing the inscription "*orbi*," and across it, in the form of a weathercock, a large gilt feather, which made it turn with the wind. On the façade of the temple you read these words—*To Voltaire*; and below, this line from the "*Henriade*:"

"Il ôte aux nations le bandeau de l'erreur."

Proceeding along the terrace, you reached the entrance, which looked upon the boulevard, and opened into an immense spherical court, in the centre of which was a rock covered with creeping plants, and surmounted by a figure of the Gladiator. On one side of this court was the house, presenting a semicircular *façade*, with arcades and columns, which, to judge by a drawing from which I take this description, would form an original and imposing *ensemble*; at the other end of the court was the entrance to the garden, closed by an elegant gate. The interior of the house was arranged in the same original and sumptuous style; there were to be remarked in it underground kitchens, immense cellars, elegant staircases, with balustrades of mahogany and brass rails, spacious apartments decorated with as much taste as magnificence, a billiard-room with seats for the spectators, a vast *salon* completely round, lighted by one immense window and by a cupola at an elevation of thirty feet, a floor in mosaic of the choicest woods, paintings by Robert and Vernet in place of tapestry and let

into panels, mantelpieces of Carrara marble supported by caryatides which Beaumarchais had procured at an immense expense from Italy, and mahogany doors with looking-glass centres. In the cabinet of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was a *secrétaire* worth not less than thirty thousand francs: it was entirely in marqueterie, representing delightful landscapes.

The garden, with its terraces, which had caused the removal of great quantities of soil, was designed and planted so as to disguise the limited space it occupied, and it appeared much larger than it was; a wide carriage-drive ran quite through it to the end of the property; sloping downs, masonry work, masses of the rarest flowers, pretty constructions placed with art at different distances, a piece of water surrounded by shady trees, on which small boats moved about, and which was supplied by a cascade from a rock—every where contrivances, more or less singular attracted the attention of the visitors. For example, in the middle of the garden rose a temple to Bacchus, with a little Greek colonnade. As this temple was intended for collations, it bore this inscription in macaronic Latin on the pediment:

"Erexi templum à Bacchus
Amicis que gourmandibus."

This temple was raised upon another rock, whose sombre and mysterious entrance hid a gastronomic laboratory. Not far from this was a Chinese bridge, with its obligato accompaniment of bells; at the side opened a cavern, which extended to the end of the garden, passing under the piece of water, a real tunnel of cut stone in which an ice-house had been introduced, and which terminated in an arcade with a railing, which opened into the Rue Amelot.

Such was the sumptuous and charming retreat that Beaumarchais was preparing for his old age. As he did not inhabit it until 1791, and as it was his destiny to attract the attention of the curious in every thing he did, which he did not dislike, notwithstanding the bitterness by which it was sometimes accompanied, his house was for nearly two years a sort of public monument, that the Parisians of all classes, and the provincials who came to Paris, thought themselves bound to

visit, so much so that the proprietor had tickets of admission printed, which he gave to whoever asked for them politely. Often, even, when the form of the request made it worth the trouble, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" added to the admission asked for a few lines of his prose, always pleasing, and varying according to the quality or sex of the person who applied.

Now there is not even a trace of this house, this garden, those groves, those buildings, those inscriptions, arranged with so much care and love. All this was not to last even thirty years. It was useless to build and plant so much. The smallest piece of paper scrawled on by the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" has been more durable than his monument.

From the 14th of July, Beaumarchais had a presentiment of the new dangers which awaited him. He had seen with gladness the convocation of the States-General; he had hoped that thus, without too great a shock, the regeneration of France might be attained by a constitution limiting the royal power, and the destruction of those abuses which he, for his part, had so warmly attacked. Gudin informs us, in his manuscript, that on this point Beaumarchais had greater illusions than himself, and frequently combated his mistrust. "Do not alarm," he said, "those minds that the firm hope of a great amelioration can sustain in the astonishing career which is opening before us." Feeling himself under the weight of a violent unpopularity, caused by his recent quarrel with Bergasse, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" did not solicit the functions of deputy, and kept at a distance observing events. Soon the foolish resistance of the court, and a part of the privileged orders to the just wishes of the *tiers état*, led to the first popular *coup d'état*, which inaugurated in France the disastrous and immoral régime of *coups d'états* of all shades. Beaumarchais saw the fall of the Bastille from his yet unfinished home. In the troubles of that day and the following one, he figured as the president of the district des Blancs-Manteaux, occupied in maintaining order in his quarter, and preserving some disarmed soldiers from the fury of the people—a constant and uniform incident in revolutions. Here is the letter he writes

to a captain of the regiment of Salis-Allemand on sending him back one of his soldiers, a note in which is painted both the agitation of the moment and the true political sentiments of Beaumarchais, at least at that epoch.

“Wednesday, July 15, 1789.”

“In returning to my house, sir, I add to the good I have been happy enough to accomplish, that of preventing your soldier from setting out in broad day; he would be torn to pieces. I have had a great-coat and a hat belonging to one of my people given to him, which you will return to me. I have made him also take off his gaiters, that nothing may cause his recognition.

“A grenadier of the French guards, full of humanity, promises me to protect him to the barrier.

“God save the king, and restore him to his people, who, in the midst of their fury, have not lost a religious respect for this sacred name. Every thing else is broken up.

“I salute you, monsieur.

CARON DE BEAUMARCHAIS,

“President of the District des Blancs-Manteaux
at the present time.”

During the following day Beaumarchais was commissioned, at his own request, by the mayor of Paris, to superintend the demolition of the Bastille, that it might be effected without obstructing the great sewer close to it, or damaging the neighboring houses. A short time afterward he was named by the electors of his district member of the municipal body, which was then called the representation of the commune; but denunciations already showered upon him. All his adversaries in his different lawsuits, especially in the last, and all whom his riches irritated, denounced him to the fury of the mob as uttering “uncivic” sentiments, or as storing up corn or arms. His house, placed at the very entrance of that terrible faubourg, the headquarters of insurrection, appeared a sort of insolent invitation which naturally called for the visits of the people. In avoiding these dangerous visits Beaumarchais passed his life: at one time asking for official visits either from the districts or from the municipality, and placarding all over the quarter the result of these visits, stating uniformly that nothing suspicious had been found in his house; at another time distributing around him as much money as possible, for disorder and misery walk together, and in proposing to the

municipality all kinds of charitable institutions. In truth, he did all this good rather openly ; his left hand was not entirely ignorant of what his right hand was doing ; but who can bring that as a crime against him when he had only this means of protecting himself against the most unjust and formidable unpopularity ? All his troubles, all his personal dangers, did not prevent him from following, with great attention, the progress of public affairs, nor from speaking his mind, every time the opportunity presented itself, with a frankness which was not without courage.

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" adored his only daughter. This good fatherly disposition of his, so simple, so affectionate, so cheerful, and which makes us love him, is especially seen in an old French round, in which he celebrates the return of his daughter Eugénie to the paternal roof. This round has already been noticed as a charming composition by an excellent judge.* It is, perhaps, indeed the happiest of Beaumarchais' poetic inspirations. The artless turn of the old popular songs appears in it with a mixture of graceful amenity, wit, and gayety.

The couplets being spread abroad, spread at the same time the idea that the only daughter of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," a charming person and a rich heiress, was marriageable, and that her father was only desirous of choosing a husband by the merit of the competitors. Now, as the number of persons who possess nothing but merit is always very great, Beaumarchais had offers of marriage submitted to him in 1791 of a most singular description. At one time a gentleman who does not value his coat of arms, who despises the fortune he no longer possesses, and who esteems virtue only, desires to marry Mademoiselle Eugénie and her portion ; elsewhere a father quite unknown to Beaumarchais begs him to keep his daughter for his son, who is still at school ; then, again, comes a captain who has but his sword, but it is worth the bâton of a marshal of France. To scatter politely this crowd of virtuous and disinterested would-be husbands, the father of Mademoiselle Eugénie wrote a letter, which served him for nearly all them, excepting some slight modifications.

* M. Saint-Marc Girardin, in his "Notice sur Beaumarchais."

Here is a copy of it, addressed to a poor, but good and brave officer.

“Paris, May 21, 1791.

“Although your letter, sir, appears to have its origin in a piece of pleasantry, as it is written with earnest civility, I owe it an answer. You have been deceived respecting my daughter; scarcely fourteen, she is yet far from the time when I shall leave her mistress to choose herself a master. Perhaps you are ignorant of the circumstances which have led to your proposal. I have very lately taken my daughter from her convent. My joy at her return having extracted a round from my idleness, after having been sung at my table, it has been circulated every where. The jovial, Gallic, civic tone introduced into it, joined to the jesting about the future establishment of my daughter, has made many persons fancy I already thought of such a thing; but may Minerva preserve me from engaging her before the age when her heart will be given with a knowledge of what it imports! The convent has completed her physical education; it is for me to complete her moral education before giving her up to her own feelings in so serious a case as one that will bind her for life. This, sir, is not the business of a few months, but of years.

“What my round has said in joke will be certainly my rule for enlightening her young heart. Fortune will have less effect on me than talents and virtue, for my wish is that she may be happy. A long line of ancestors is ceasing to have any signification; no living being exists without ancestors; and as for those who were noble, henceforth they will not influence the fate of their descendants; each will be what he is worth; thus the law, the Constitution, and reason will have it to be. Ah! reason above all, so much insulted by our Gothic institutions.

“I send you, monsieur, my rather jocular round, and if you sing it, you will sometimes say, ‘The good old man loved his daughter dearly, and was not in his dotage.’ Receive my thanks for all the obliging things by which you have deigned to honor me, and the sincere wishes of the husbandman

BEAUMARCHAIS.”

We have just seen in this letter that Beaumarchais thought very little of titles of nobility; however, when the Constitutional Assembly abolished them, and decreed that each individual should be reduced to his primitive name, or should suppress his particle, the author of “The Marriage of Figaro” speaks of this decree with a raillery through which peeps a little ill-humor. After that, although his titles, for which he had the receipt, were of a more modern date than those of Mirabeau, he could, without much presumption, imitate the

speech of the celebrated orator to the journalists, who, in obedience to the decree, named him Riquetti: "With your Riquetti you have confused Europe during three days." It was certainly necessary for the public to have some days to accustom themselves to recognize Beaumarchais in Caron. It was to his wife, who was then at the waters of Saint-Amand, that the ex-secretary of the king transmitted his impressions upon the decree of the Constituent Assembly, in a letter of the 22d June, 1790, from which I extract the following passages:

"What is to become of us, my dear? Now, we are to lose all our dignities. Reduced to our family names, without armorial bearings and without liveries! Just heaven! What ruin! I dined the day before yesterday with Madame de la Reynière, and we called her, to her face, Madame Grimod, short, and without a handle. Mgr. the Bishop of Rodez, and Mgr. the Bishop of Agen, were addressed as monsieur; each was called by his name; it was like leaving a ball at the Opera in winter when every body is unmasked.

"I wrote this morning to Madame la Comtesse de Choiseul-Gouffier. I said, 'Until July 14, I will give you, madame, from respect to your rights, the title of countess, but afterward you will have to thank me for it, if you please; it will be pure courtesy.'

"I send you, in the original, an invitation to a female club that I received for you yesterday. I replied that you were at the waters, but that you joined in their intentions; that at least I presumed so; and I have addressed my answer to Madame la Secrétaire. I think the 14th will be the finest thing ever seen.* But Louis XIV., on the 14th, will be stripped like the rest of the great. No more slaves at his feet in the Place des Victoires. Ah! but what destruction! To leave the good Henri IV. his four chained statues, we assert they are four vices; they dispute it with us, but we do not give up the point. . . .

"I showed on Sunday that I had no more possessions which bore the name of Beaumarchais, and that the decree clearly stated that persons should no longer retain their *noms de terre*, but that nothing ought to be taken from the *noms de guerre*, and it was always under that name I had vanquished my cowardly enemies. . . ."

By the side of this friendly letter, in which the author seems to be speaking with a smile on his lips, of the 14th July, and of all the excitements of the time, I find one in a solemn tone, addressed to the president of the National Guard, which is

* He alludes to the 14th July, the day of the Federation.

nothing less than a proposition to raise on the Champ de Mars a monument on a gigantic plan.

"In the midst of this immense circle," he writes, "upon a square piece of ground 210 feet in extent, I raise a triumphal column to Truth 148 feet high, to the base of which you arrive by a flight of forty steps 120 feet long, on each side of the square, &c. All the remainder is in the same proportion. I remark in it, among other pleasing things, four guard-houses, which, united by subterranean galleries, might serve during the fêtes as a reserve for the national guards, and contain seven or eight thousand men." This civic embellishment seems to me to indicate that the spirit of order and conservation never forsook Beaumarchais.

Sometimes the political anxieties of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" were expressed with a fervor, through which was seen a noble and sincere sentiment; thus, in the last days of the Constituent Assembly, at the very time when this assembly was destroying itself by its imprudence, and consuming its last days in the midst of miserable conflicts, Beaumarchais, writing on the 10th September, 1791, to one of the most honorable members of the majority, Beaumetz, with whom he was connected, exclaims, "Who could have believed that the end of so great a work would be dishonored by such vile debates, and that we should give to our enemies, without and within, the triumph of seeing our Constitution almost crumble away at the time when we ought to be giving it a solid standing? Miserable interest, and still more miserable ambition, which renders our legislators the laughing-stock of those who took a pleasure in respecting them. And M. de Bouillé, and M. de Calonne, and M. d'Autichamp, raise the spirits of their party by showing them what strength our divisions give them. While you are leaving all our affairs in disorder, is it the Legislature of lawyers which we are forming by these cabals that will re-establish them?"

The future did not always appear to Beaumarchais under so sombre an aspect, to judge by the more cheerful picture that he addressed to a Russian prince at St. Petersburg, November 12, 1791. Perhaps national pride induced him to represent things as a little better than he thought them.

"The Revolution," he wrote, "has had a great influence upon literature. Free nations generally lose in grace what they acquire in strength, and our theatre is affected by the new spirit in France. All occupied by great interests, and become half republican, we can no longer mould ourselves to the effeminate literature suitable to the *ancien régime*; but it must be confessed that, in trying to straighten our tree, we have made it bend in the opposite direction.

"Hard words, which drive away the Muses, are in our actors' mouths. We have strong castles instead of palaces, and cannons for an orchestra. The *rue* takes the place of the *ruelle*; where we once heard sighs, we now hear the cry of liberty; and Live free or die in place of I adore you. These are our plays and amusements. It is Athens the pleasing a little changed into Sparta the stern; but the pleasing being our element, the return of peace will restore our character, only with more vigor added to it; our gayety will regain the upper hand."

While thus giving himself up to the observation and appreciation of public affairs, Beaumarchais continued his epistolary intercourse with the insulters, the beggars, the schemers, who besieged him, as in times past, but not without some fresh characteristic of the license of the times.

We will give one slight specimen of the degree of effrontery which a rogue can use in exercising his calling; it is one among many of the same kind that Beaumarchais received in 1790.

"Sir,—I have just bought a manuscript which is entitled 'Confessions of M. de Beaumarchais.' This pamphlet may contain about five sheets in octavo. I am ready to have it printed, but I should be sorry to make the pamphlet public, as it would bring you a great many enemies. I purchased it for six louis; several persons have offered me a profit of six louis on it; and, if I allow it to be printed, I can not say of what advantage it may be to me. Therefore, sir, consider if you would like to arrange with me. Make me any offer you may like, and depend upon my zeal and discretion."

"As I am bargaining for the printing, I beg you to give me an answer by Tuesday evening. Address the letter to M. Bunel, *chez* Mademoiselle Bondidier, marchande lingère, Rue Comtesse d'Artois."

Here is Beaumarchais' short but expressive answer:

"I would not give six liards to prevent a libel upon myself seeing the day, but I would willingly give six louis to him who would bring me the ears of the scoundrel who has written it, and six more for those of the wretch who is going to print it; and, as every work mer-

its reward, I am going to give up Sieur Bunel's letter, that he may receive his from the national justice when his libel appears.

"BEAUMARCHAIS."

Then comes a very clever man, M. Simonnet, who has devoted himself to wonderful calculations upon the chances in lotteries, and who pursues Beaumarchais with marvelous plans, for which he requires funds. The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" very benevolently takes the trouble to set his mind right, or, at all events, to show him he is not his dupe.

"I have passed my life, sir," he writes to him, "in gaining from the lottery all the money I have not put into it, and I congratulate myself upon it every day. In giving a critical and strict glance at these frightful establishments of lotteries, hot-beds of all the evils of the people, which only serve to fill the hospitals and prisons, I find that the lottery which is so improperly named *royal*, and which ought to be named *infernal*, is carried on, so that the least fatal manner of striking is certainly on the *extraits*; but even then, if you placed at each drawing twenty sous on each number, you would have expended ninety livres. You would always gain the five *extraits*, or five times fifteen for yourself—that is to say, seventy-five francs—from which it results that the smallest loss that could be sustained at this infamous game is fifteen out of ninety, under the most favorable hypothesis. I should pity you, sir, for having a mania for this game if you had funds to chance in it, but as you only solicit them elsewhere, the only danger that you run is the grief of having drawn into your ruinous speculations those who might commit the folly of yielding to them. I salute you frankly.

"CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

The ordinary begging letter-writers have not the same characteristics they had before the Revolution. Repulsed, they return to the charge, write insulting and threatening letters; and Beaumarchais, who had already so many enemies on his shoulders that he did not wish to increase the number, while he gave to some, passed a part of his life in proving as eloquently as possible that he could not give to others.

In the midst of preoccupations, and of the various disquietudes of which we have just sketched a picture, Beaumarchais found time to give himself up to the two passions which occupied so much of his life—the theatre and state speculation. He wrote his drama of "La Mère Coupable," and engaged to supply the French government with sixty thousand guns.

Let us speak of the drama before the affair of the guns, which forms also a kind of drama, in which the hero will be seen fearfully victimized.

Finished in January, 1791, "*La Mère Coupable*" was read in February, and accepted at the Théâtre-Française; but at this time there was going on between the authors and actors that eternal lawsuit of which we have already spoken, and which the Legislature, like the Constituent Assembly, decided in favor of the authors. Beaumarchais, intrusted by the latter to defend their interests, did so with a sincerity that caused a rupture between the Théâtre-Française and himself. A new company, which, with his support, had just opened a theatre in his neighborhood, in the Marais, solicited his piece, and it was represented for the first time at this theatre the 6th of June, 1792. Weakly played at first, it had but little success; afterward revived by the French comedians, in May, 1797, it completely succeeded; and even now, when it is represented by skillful actors, it produces a lively impression on the public.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Beaumarchais after the 10th August.—His 60,000 Guns.—His Lawsuit.
—The Convention.

At the same time that Beaumarchais gave his last piece to the theatre, he embarked in a new patriotic and commercial work, which was to ruin his fortune, and be the torment of his latter days.

France wanted arms in 1792: he undertook to procure them. One can scarcely understand how a man sixty years of age, rich, worn out by a most stormy life, afflicted by continually increasing deafness, surrounded by enemies, and only wishing for repose, could be induced to encumber himself with the task of bringing into France 60,000 guns, which were detained in Holland under circumstances that rendered the work as dangerous as it was difficult.

In reflecting on Beaumarchais' decided taste for dangerous

speculations, provided they presented a certain character of public interest, we must, I think, in looking for the cause of this rash enterprise, seek it in his unpopularity at the time. "I told him," Gudin relates in his manuscript on this subject, "that a wise man in revolutionary times did not trade in arms or corn ; but my prudence was false ; in these times of disorder and uncertainty, they would have made it a crime on his part to have refused to procure the arms they had requested of him. His refusal would have been considered disaffection ; he had but a choice of dangers ; he exposed himself to the peril of being useful to his country."

At the commencement of 1792, a Belgian came and offered him 60,000 guns, obtained from the disarming of the Low Countries, deposited in Holland, and sold by Austria, who, foreseeing a war with France, had stipulated that the purchaser should send them to the colonies. Beaumarchais transmitted the proposition to the minister of war, De Grave, who employed him to bring the guns into France secretly, promising to pay a suitable price, and to advance him 500,000 francs in *assignats*, worth then about *three hundred thousand francs* ; but the minister obliged him to deposit securities to the amount of 745,000 francs guaranteed by the city of Paris.

Beaumarchais obtained the promise that, if he wanted more money for the transport of the arms, they would remit him on a part of the surplus 445,000 francs left as a deposit with the minister. The government also promised to use all its power to overcome the resistance of the Dutch government, which, fearing to embroil itself with Austria, detained them at Ter-vère, a port of Zealand. War soon broke out between Austria and Prussia ; Beaumarchais was not less ardent in asking for assistance in overcoming the resistance of Holland, with which they were still at peace ; but, during the last year of the monarchy of Louis XVI., ministers succeeded each other with the rapidity of lightning. It was in vain that Beaumarchais assailed them. "I have *tired out*," he said, "in a few months, fourteen or fifteen of them : " he could not obtain their support in Holland, nor the money promised from the overplus of his deposit to transport these unfortunate guns ; and while he exhausted himself in efforts, his enemies spread the report

among the people that the guns were at his house, that he had them in cellars, and kept them to massacre the patriots. Nothing more was necessary to make them massacre him. The ex-Capuchin Chabot, a member of the Legislative Assembly, denounced him to the tribune as concealing arms in a very suspicious place. Beaumarchais, always true to his character, told Chabot that he, Chabot, would be twenty times more to be suspected than the place, if he did not point it out. The following day, August 10th, the people went in crowds to his beautiful house on the boulevard, and searched it from top to bottom, without, however, taking away a pin. In the midst of this frightful scene, which the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" describes at length in a letter already published, addressed to his daughter, whom he had just sent with her mother to Havre, he is seen preserving sufficient coolness to study the unruly people, and to "admire," he says, "that mixture of wildness and natural justice which appears through all the disorder." Some days afterward, although he had taken care to publish every where, according to his custom, that the people had found nothing suspicious at his house, he was arrested, and conducted to the Abbaye, the 23d of August. He was there on the 30th—that is to say, two days before the massacre of September—when it suddenly came into the head of the procurator of the commune, Manuel, to remember that he had had some quarrels with Beaumarchais, in which the latter had wittily ridiculed him; and he thought it would be a noble revenge to take him out of prison. Let us add, to be exact, that it was a woman to whom Beaumarchais had rendered a service, and who had some influence over Manuel, that decided him to this act of generosity. However, on the 30th, Manuel told his old adversary that he was free. Beaumarchais did not wait to be told this twice; he left, and the next morning but one the massacre began.

It would seem natural enough, at such a moment, that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" should put his guns aside to occupy himself especially with the preservation of his person; but, in becoming deaf, he had acquired some of the obstinacy which is said to accompany that infirmity. He consented to hide himself, but only during the day, a few miles

from Paris. Each night he returned on foot, across plowed fields, to avoid unpleasant meetings, and went to claim of the ministers the fulfillment of their predecessors' engagements, and to assist him in obtaining from Holland the 60,000 guns he had promised the nation. It must also be said, to explain his pertinacity, that it being known that he was the agent in this affair placed him in a state of continued suspicion with the people until he had succeeded; and also, that he thought he saw that the minister Lebrun was going to work the affair secretly, for his own profit, leaving to him, in case of necessity, all the responsibility of a failure. This was what rendered him so tenacious that he fatigued and wore out even Danton, who could not avoid laughing to see a man who was so compromised, and who ought to think of nothing but his safety, persevere, the day after the massacre of September, in coming every evening to ask for what they still owed on his deposit, and a mission to Holland.

At length, after the deliberation of a commission of the Legislative Assembly, called the *Commission of Arms*, which declared Beaumarchais had deserved well of the nation, and insisted of the executive power that he should be put in a position to finish the enterprise, the minister Lebrun gave him a passport for Holland, promising to remit to him at the Hague the necessary money to raise the embargo the Dutch government had laid on the guns. The minister also declared to him that the French ambassador at the Hague would be directed to give his assistance to his operations. Upon the faith of this promise of the minister, Beaumarchais set out for Holland, and in passing through London he borrowed, at all hazards, a large sum of an English merchant, his correspondent and friend. Arrived at the Hague, he found the French minister without instructions respecting him, and without money; besides which, he found himself crossed in all his transactions by the secret agents of the minister Lebrun, who had already had him imprisoned at the Abbaye on the eve of the massacre of September. Vainly he wrote from Holland letter upon letter to Lebrun, to remind him of his promises. Lebrun only gave him evasive answers, sent Beaumarchais to Pache, the minister of war, and at last declared the government no longer wanted the guns.

In the interval, the Legislative Assembly had given place to the Convention. One fine morning, the 1st December, 1792, Beaumarchais read in the "Gazette de la Haye" that he was accused of conspiracy, of secret correspondence with Louis XVI., of dilapidation, and that they have for a third time put seals on his house. His friends write to him at the same time, and inform him that it was contemplated sending a courier to have him arrested in Holland, and bring him bound hand and foot to Paris, with the chance of being massacred on the road: they begged him to return immediately to England. He set out for London. There he received the report presented to the Convention by Laurent Lecointre; a report in which the deputy, deceived by those who for eight months had sought to deprive Beaumarchais of a deplorable business which he ought to have resigned to them a hundred times, falsified the facts in the grossest manner, including in the same accusation of dilapidation and conspiracy the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" and the two last constitutional ministers of Louis XVI., De Grave and Chambonas. "These vile, grasping men," said Lecointre, "before plunging the country into the abyss they had prepared for it, disputed for the execrable honor of tearing from it its last covering." As for Beaumarchais, in particular, he is politely described by Lecointre, "an essentially vicious man, corrupt by inclination, who has reduced immorality to a principle, and *villainy to a system*." Now the only villainy of the unfortunate speculator consisted in having risked in this most detestable affair 745,000 francs of contracts, producing a yearly income of 72,000 francs, against 500,000 assignats, worth, at the rate of 1792, 300,000 francs, with the prospect of losing both his deposit of 745,000 francs, the guns he had paid for in Holland, and at last to be guillotined into the bargain.

But the former enemy of Goëzman loves discussion too well to let himself be silently guillotined. On seeing his decree of accusation, he prepared to return to Paris to plead in person before the Convention, as if it were the Maupeou Parliament, when he was stopped by an unexpected obstacle. The English merchant, his friend and correspondent, who had lent him a month before a rather considerable sum expended in

Holland, had but slight confidence in the judicial proceedings of the Convention, and was too interested in the preservation of his debtor to let him leave England before paying him. "It was too much for him," Beaumarchais wrote naïvely to Gudin, "to lose both his money and his friend." The London merchant began by arresting his dear friend himself; while otherwise making his life as easy as possible, he had him shut up in a house of detention for debt, called the King's Bench Prison. A man of less combative disposition than Beaumarchais would have thought, perhaps, that in January, 1793, at the time of appearing before the Convention under the weight of a capital accusation, it was no great misfortune to be detained, on the other side of the Channel, in a prison of not much strictness, by a friendly and obliging creditor, who did not allow him to want any thing. But at sixty the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" had lost none of his stubborn ardor. He was also excited by the circumstance that the Convention held his family and his fortune as hostages. He only thought of returning to recommence his continual occupation of suitor; and while the faithful cashier Gudin, in the midst of the ruin of all property, occupied himself in procuring the funds necessary to repay his English creditor, he devoted the forced leisure of his imprisonment in drawing up a long memorial to the Convention, and wrote to the President of that assembly to inform him of his speedy return to Paris, so determined was he to defend himself against the accusations of Lecointre. As soon as his creditor is paid, he leaves prison, quits England, arrives in Paris in March, 1793, with his Memorial, has six thousand copies of it published, sends it to all the sections, all the clubs, all the authorities of the time, and fears not to wrestle boldly with all the unpopularity that hangs over him. "I have come," he wrote to the formidable Santerre, then commandant of the National Guard, "I have come to offer my head to the sword of justice if I can not prove I am a great citizen. Save me, Citizen Commandant, from pillage and the dagger, and I shall again be servicable to my country." Other persons were contented to save their fortune and their head; that did not satisfy Beaumarchais: he must still prove he is a *great citizen*. It is

rather amusing that the great patriot Santerre, who, it is known, before becoming a general, was a brewer in the Faubourg St. Antoine, seems to have a certain deference for his correspondent. His answer, which we reproduce literally, shows that, as regards style and orthography, this great patriot was about equal to the Duke de Fronsac.

"*Citoien*,—Je reçois votre lettre et vos imprimés. Je n'ai jamais ajouté foy aux calomnies sur votre voyage de *Londre*; je n'y ai vu qu'une démarche *util* à la république. Je ne vous ai connu que voulant faire le bien des pauvres. Je pense que vous n'avez pas à craindre le pillage ni le poignard; cependant, malgré que la vérité ne soit qu'une il est nécessaire d'éclairer ceux que nous croyons *trompé*.

"Une affiche au peuple ferait, je pense, bien.

"Le citoyen Célerier fut celui qui me remit vos premiers imprimés que j'ai *distribué*.

SANTERRE, Commandant-général.

"Ce 23 Mars, 1793, l'An 2."

It is unnecessary to add that Beaumarchais followed the advice given by Santerre, and issued a fresh placard to the people, which he had been continually doing from the commencement of the Revolution; he also sent his Memorial to the Jacobins, with the following note:

"Every good citizen unjustly accused ought to be entirely occupied in justifying himself to the nation. This is what the citizen Beaumarchais is doing by publishing the 'Six Epochs,' and he begs the assembly, which is the mother of all patriotic societies, to accept a copy, while waiting for the decision of the National Convention.

"April 12, Year 2 of the Republic."

We will pass rapidly over this voluminous address of Beaumarchais' to the Convention, which the author divided into Six Epochs, to mark the different phases through which this affair of the guns had passed from its commencement in 1792 until March, 1793. Gudin thought he ought to give the whole of this long work in the edition of the works of his friend: he should have contented himself with an abridgment; for, if it gives some interesting details of the history of the men and manners of the time, its style is in general feeble, and the multiplied calculations it contains about the subject of supplies render it painful to read. In a word, as M. Sainte-Beuve justly says, "A singular and unexpected thing happened to Beaumarchais; he became tedious." It may well be imagined that the author was not aware of the excessive length

which gives such weight to his pleadings when, worn out and old, he defended his fortune and his life; but Gudin might have thought that posterity, not having the same interest in the lawsuit, would find the justification rather tiresome: he would have done better to have shortened the first part of the affair, and to have related the second, which remains unknown, and presents more interest than the first. Still, if this work is in part tedious, it is far from meriting the criticism a writer published, who no doubt had never read it, when he says Beaumarchais appeared as timid before the Convention as he had been bold before the Maupeou Parliament.

Far from being timid, this address is sometimes astonishing from its boldness, when we think of the times, and remember that the author was in the power of the expeditious judges to whom he had addressed himself. One might often think he had not a clear idea of what was passing around him, and that he fancied he was still at an epoch when the government was satisfied with *blaming* audacious suitors. Thus he writes, with a force free from all oratorical artifice, "I would defy the devil to advance any business in this frightful time of disorder that they call liberty." Then he pays a homage to the young and virtuous Sombreuil, before whom, he says, "my soul bowed down at the Abbaye at the approach of the 2d of September." Farther on, again, he ridicules the Jacobin Marat, then in his full power, as he would have done with Goëzman, without troubling himself to learn if the Jacobin Marat did not enjoy sufficient influence to do him a great injury. "A little man," he said, "with black hair, snub nose, a frightful countenance, came, spoke in a low voice to the President; shall I tell you, O my readers? It was the *great*, the *just*, in a word, the *merciful* Marat." Elsewhere he courageously defends the two ministers of Louis XVI., whose names had been put into the same decree of accusation with him, and he says quite plainly, "In this national affair the *Royalist* ministers have alone done their duty, and every obstacle has come from the popular ministers." "I was annoyed under our old administration," he writes in another page: "the ministers tormented me, but the annoyances of those were but jokes compared to the horror of these;" and he finishes with this peroration,

which is not wanting in eloquence, but, above all, is not wanting in courage :

“ Oh, my country in tears ! Oh, unhappy French ! what use will it have been to you to have thrown down Bastilles, if robbers dance upon them, and slaughter us upon their ruins ? *True friends of liberty !* know that its first executioners are license and anarchy ; join your cries to mine, and let us ask laws of the deputies, who have only been named our proxies on this condition. Let us make peace with Europe. Was not the greatest day of our glory that in which we declared it to the world ? Let us strengthen our interior ; let us form a constitution without disputes, without storms, and above all, if possible, without crimes. Your maxims will be established ; they will spread much better than by war, murder, and devastation, *if people see you are happy through them.* Are you so ? Let us be sincere. Is it not with the blood of Frenchmen that our earth is watered ? Speak ! is there one of us who has not had to shed tears ? Peace, laws, a constitution—without these benefits there is no country, and certainly no liberty.”

To write, sign, and publish such things on the 6th March, 1793, to stop in Paris after having published them until after the 31st May, was certainly the act of a man who did not fear danger, and M. Sainte-Beuve very well described the man and the situation when he said on this subject, “ What astonishes me is that he preserved his head.” It is probable, indeed, that Beaumarchais would have shared the fate of so many other victims, much less compromised than himself, but for an unforeseen circumstance: he proved by the most undoubted evidence that the report of Lecointre, which led to his accusation, was but a tissue of folly and lies. His position with the government was that of a man who had received for a supply of guns 500,000 francs in assignats, worth 300,000 francs, who had deposited 745,000 francs as security, who could not furnish the supply agreed upon because the government had not given him the support it had promised, and who said to the government, “ You have failed in your engagement to assist me by a fresh remittance of money, and by the intervention of your minister in Holland to send for the guns I have bought for you, and which the Dutch government retain by force at Tervère. I am ready to return you the 500,000 francs in assignats that you have advanced me ; return me the

745,000 francs in contracts that you made me deposit, and we shall be clear. I shall have to lose the expenses of my journey, and my trouble. I shall make the best I can of the guns at Tervère, and, on your side, you will procure arms where you can."

This just and reasonable conclusion for ordinary times would, in March, 1793, infallibly have conducted Beaumarchais to prison, to go a little later where people were then taken on leaving prison; but the government, which till then had seemed to care little enough about these guns, declared they were indispensable. France was, indeed, attacked on all parts; after the execution of Louis XVI. England united with all the Continental powers against her. The Committee of Public Safety proposed to the Convention to *suspend* the decree of accusation against Beaumarchais, and to erase the order of sequestration upon his property: they afterward sent for him, and gave him a choice between a condemnation with its consequences, and the agreeable mission of going a second time into an enemy's country (for Holland had at this time definitively entered into the coalition) to fetch sixty thousand guns retained at Tervère. The task had become much more difficult, for the publicity given to the silly report of Lecointre had determined the English government, since the month of January, 1793, to take measures for seizing these guns as French property. But Beaumarchais, who always had his wits about him, having had wind of this project at the very time he was imprisoned in London, had induced the English merchant, his correspondent and friend, who had incarcerated him, to become, in consideration of a large share, the fictitious purchaser of these guns, and to keep them at Tervère, in his name, as English property, till the true proprietor could dispose of them. But this fictitious purchaser could not retain them long, for the cabinet of London said to him, "Either you are the real proprietor of these guns, or you are not; if you are, we are ready to reimburse you the value of them; if you are not, we mean to confiscate them." The Englishman, faithful to his engagement with Beaumarchais, resisted, affirming that the guns were his property; asserting his right to dispose of them as he liked: and that respect for the law, which

distinguishes and honors the English among all governments, leaving the question yet undecided, the guns remained at Tervère, where they were, however, watched by an English ship.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Beaumarchais Agent for the Committee of Public Safety abroad, and at the same time on the List of Emigrants.—Difficulties of his Mission.—Confiscation of his Property.—Imprisonment of his Family.—Private Life at Paris during and after the Reign of Terror.—Beaumarchais at Hamburg.

SUCH was the state of things with regard to these unfortunate guns, when the Committee of Public Safety signified to Beaumarchais that he was to set out again for these arms, and that if he did not bring them to France, or at least prevent their falling into the hands of enemies, his family and property, in default of his person, would be answerable for the success of the operation.

Beaumarchais urged that, in an affair that was now so much known, he wanted money more than ever to avoid the increased obstacles that shackled him; the committee had all his property at their disposal, and his contracts to the amount of 745,000 francs; the least they could do was to furnish him with the means of fulfilling the very difficult mission they imposed on him. The committee, wishing to have the guns at any price, made a fresh remittance to Beaumarchais of 618,000 francs in assignats, worth then about 200,000 francs, promising to remit more money if it were necessary, and to adopt, at his request, any plan that seemed to him necessary for recovering the arms. A resolution of the committee, dated 22d May, 1793, signed Breard, Guyton, Barrère, Danton, Robert Lindet, Delacroix, Cambon, and Delmas, invested the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" with the title of Commissioner of the Republic for a secret foreign mission. And now, in his sixty-second year, he sets out again, in June, 1793, under the false name of Pierre Charron, assisted by two friends, who have also changed their names, to go this time at a pe-

riod of open war, in the very midst of the enemies of France, to fetch for France sixty thousand guns. To tell the innumerable turnings and windings he had to make to avoid the dangers of this second mission, going from Amsterdam to Bâle, from Bâle to Hamburg, from Hamburg to London, where he received an order to quit in less than three days; to expose the numerous subterfuges that he was obliged to employ to prevent the Dutch and the English from carrying off these guns; to relate how he successively passed them through the hands of three fictitious purchasers; how he at last still fictitiously sold them to a merchant of the United States, with the determination of sending them, if needful, even to America, and fetching them back thence to France; to enter into the details of all these manœuvres, which Beaumarchais directed like the intrigue of a complicated comedy, would be too long. By these means he succeeded in retaining the guns at Tervère, and when the time appeared favorable to him, he earnestly entreated the Committee of Public Safety to hasten the catastrophe by giving an order to General Pichegru to advance and carry off the guns; but the committee, absorbed by a thousand affairs at the same time, allowed him to struggle alone in the difficulties of an affair which could now only be decided by force of arms. The only missive he received at this period from the Committee of Public Safety is this note from Robert Lindet, dated Pluviôse, Year 5 (January 26, 1794), showing plainly, it appears to me, in its hasty conciseness, the sort of fever which devoured these dictators, contending, as they were, with all Europe:

“We must have celerity,” Lindet wrote; “you must not wait for the result of events. If you delay too long, the service will not be appreciated; we must have great services, and they must be rendered quickly. We do not calculate the difficulties; we look only to the results and the success.”

While Beaumarchais did his best to execute the orders of the Committee of Public Safety, the committee not only abandoned him to himself, but with a thoughtlessness which is a sign of the times, it allowed its agent to be placed on the list of *émigrés*; it allowed his property to be seized, the arrears of his 745,000 francs deposited by him to be stopped, and

imprisoned his family. The department of Paris not knowing the cause of Beaumarchais' absence, and looking upon his property as fair game, had at first thought fit to declare him an *émigré*, to replace the seals on his goods, and to stop all payments to him. Upon the remonstrance of Madame Beaumarchais, the Committee of Public Safety had given, dated Frimaire 25, Year 2 (December, 1793), a decision, by which it declared "that the Citizen Beaumarchais was fulfilling a secret mission, and ordered that he should not be treated as an *émigré*. (Signed in the Register: Carnot, Billaud-Varennes, Robert Lindet, Robespierre, Barrère, Saint-Just, Couthon, C. A. Prieur.)" Upon this decision the seals were removed. Three months afterward, Ventose 24, Year 2, in the midst of the anarchical conflict of powers at this time, the Committee of General Safety had taken the liberty of annulling the order of the Committee of Public Safety, and of declaring Beaumarchais once more an *émigré*, and the Department of Paris had afresh placed the seals on his real estate, and confiscated all his claims and all his income.

During the height of the Terror, not satisfied with having seized his property, the Committee of General Safety, by an order of the 17th Messidor, Year 2 (July 5, 1794), signed Dubarran, Lavicomterie, Elie Lacoste, and Amar, had arrested and imprisoned the wife, sister, and daughter of the man whom the Committee of Public Safety had charged with a secret mission.

Thanks to this division of opinion between the two committees, two unfortunate women and a young girl of eighteen detained in the convent of Port-Royal, which was transformed into a prison, and which, by an atrocious mockery, was called Port-Free, waited their turn to ascend the fatal car, when the day of the 9th Thermidor put an end to these butcheries. Eleven days afterward, the 21st Thermidor, Year 2, another order of the Committee of General Safety restored the *citoyennes* Caron to liberty.

During the sinister period of the Terror, Beaumarchais, a refugee at Hamburg, and deprived of all communication with his family, was a prey to dreadful agony. He felt that the non-success of his operations caused the danger of beings who

were dear to him ; he exhausted himself in efforts and manœuvres to prevent, at least, the English government carrying off by its authority these unfortunate guns, which, if they fell into the hands of the enemy, would both ruin him and compromise him horribly with the Committee of Public Safety. All the assignats of the committee had been spent for their preservation ; not receiving any thing from France, he had himself fallen into a state of distress, which, indeed, lasted but an instant, but which was extreme.* His correspondence shows periods of terrible despair, in which he asks himself if he is not mad. "I sometimes examine myself," he writes at this epoch, "if I am not mad ; and on seeing the immense series, the succession of ideas by which I endeavor to ward off every thing, I think I am not mad. But where am I to write to you ?" he says to his wife ; "under what name ? where do you live ? who are you ? what name do you give yourself ? who are your true friends ? whom should I make mine ? Ah ! without the hope of saving my daughter from the atrocious guillotine, death would be preferable to the horrible state I am in." It was precisely to save his daughter that Madame de Beaumarchais had, for a time, broken off any correspondence with her husband, resumed her family name, and only endeavored to make herself unknown. "As a mother," she wrote to him after the fall of Robespierre, "I had a right to employ every means to avoid for my beloved child the fate of so many innocent and worthy victims, now rehabilitated, regretted, and mourned for, but whom all this regret, all these tears, and a tardy justice will not recall."

On leaving prison, after having been so close to death, the wife, daughter, and sister of Beaumarchais found themselves in a difficult position ; all the personal estate of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was sequestrated, all his income seized ; all claims of debts that had been found in his desk, in virtue of the law applied to *émigrés*, had passed into the hands of the agents of the treasury, who took means to recover them, and his debtors hastened, even before their debts were due, to get clear of them by paying them to the state in assignats. In a word, this deplorable affair of the guns was sufficient

* He soon after received money from an American correspondent.

to give a mortal blow to a brilliant fortune laboriously acquired.

Meanwhile the sequestered property was threatened with sale; the young daughter of Beaumarchais had a horror of the magnificent house on the boulevard, which, she said in a letter to her father, had so often exposed them to the insults of the mob, and had persuaded her mother to leave. It was urgent, to preserve this house from condemnation, and to defend it as much as possible from the rapacity of the treasury, that one of the family should resolve to inhabit it. It was Julie Beaumarchais who devoted herself, and who, on leaving prison, went, when sixty years of age, to install herself, with only an old female servant, in this deserted place, guarded by agents of the Republic, and which had written on its walls "National Property."

If, as I hope, the reader has retained an agreeable remembrance of Julie, he will like, perhaps, to see again that witty, cheerful, courageous, and intelligent physiognomy, which neither old age, privations, nor danger can alter.

A description of the private and domestic life of three women, formerly rich, exposed to the difficulties of a fearful epoch, might present interesting details of the time, which history rarely gives. We will take some of these details from the correspondence of Julie and her sister-in-law. While the head of the family was proscribed, it was Madame de Beaumarchais, a person of uncommon merit, uniting to the graces of the woman the energy of a man, who bore all the weight of the situation, and who, while working on one side to stop the sale of the property of her husband, and on the other to obtain the removal of his name from the fatal list, was obliged to provide for the general support with what she had been able to save from the shipwreck. On her part, Julie, who kept her brother's house, made her sister acquainted with all the attacks of the treasury, and excited her to resistance in the animated and original style which characterized her:

"Morbleu! my child," she wrote to her, after the Terror, "let us promptly have this decree (the order of removal, from the list). Here are the fruits, as they were last year, brought into requisition; the cherries being ripe, they are going to gather and sell them to-

morrow, and the other things in time, and then close the garden to the profane and gluttonous. Is it not delightful to occupy this solitary house for six months, and to eat none of its fruit except the stones? and they will sell even them with the rest. It is for the birds I speak; for, as for myself, I never thought, considering the price these things sell at, that there would be much left for us, even though the garden is ours. However, it is a pity the agency have put their noses in here this year. The gardener from that authority came yesterday; they are going to have a sale one of these days; see whether you will bid, or, rather, prevent this robbery by some decisive act toward the agency; and since they have suspended the inventory, why will they not also leave our fruits suspended to the trees? On my honor, I believe we shall never get out of this state of things. What times!

"Here is a pound of veal they bring me for 28 francs, and yet it is cheap: it is worth 30. Rage! Fury! Curses! How can one live ruining one's self, and spending three times one's fortune? How happy are those who have gone before me! They do not feel the beatings of my head, the tears that are in my eyes, nor my devouring fever, nor my teeth, sharpened to eat 28 francs' worth of veal; they feel nothing of our misfortunes."

These 28 francs' worth of veal that Julie consumed with amusing anger leads us to say a word on the curious state of famine caused by the increasing depreciation of the assignats after the Reign of Terror. It will still be Julie who will inform us how persons lived at this time; her sister-in-law had just remitted her 4000 francs in assignats, and she gives an account of the use she made of these assignats in December, 1794:

"When you gave me these 4000 francs, dear friend, my heart beat. I thought you had become simple to give me such a fortune; I put them quickly into my pocket, and spoke on other subjects to divert your thoughts.

"I returned home, and called out quickly for wood, provisions, before every thing increases still more. There is Dupont (the old woman servant) running and doing her best; the scales fall from my eyes when I see, without the food for the month, this result of the 4275 francs:

	Francs.
One load of wood	1460
9 lbs. of candles, eights, at 100 francs the pound	900
4 lbs. of sugar, at 100 francs the pound	400
3 litrons of corn, at 40 francs	120
7 lbs. of oil, at 100 francs	700

12 wicks, at 5 francs	60
1½ bushel of potatoes, at 200 francs the bushel	300
Washing for the month	215
1 lb. of hair powder	70
2 ounces of pomatum (at 3 sous formerly) now at 25 francs	50
	4275

In addition, the food for the month—butter and eggs at 100 francs, as you know, meat from 25 to 30 francs, and all in proportion..... 567

The bread has missed two days; we only receive now one loaf every second day, from the increase of expense; the last ten days I have only bought 4 lbs. at 45 francs 180

5022

“When I think of this *regal* expenditure, as you call it, which makes me spend from 18 to 20,000 francs without living and without any comfort, I send the government to the devil: it is true that these 20,000 francs* represent 6 or 7 louis, while my 4000 francs were worth 160, which makes a difference.”

In a few days the value of the assignats lowered, and the price of provisions increased in a frightful proportion; for, in another letter to her sister-in-law, Julie gives us the following details:

“Ten thousand francs that I have scattered during the last fortnight give me such fear and sorrow that I no longer know how to reckon my income in this manner; three days have made a rise in the wood of from 4200 francs to 6500, all other expenses in proportion; so that, as I have told you, the load of wood carried up and arranged in order costs me 7100 francs. Every week, now, we must reckon from 700 to 800 francs for a *pot-au-feu*, and other sorts of meat for ragouts, without the butter, the eggs, and a thousand other details; the washing also increases every day to such an extreme that 8000 livres a month would not be sufficient for it. This enrages me; and in all these expenses, I swear by the holy truth of my heart that I have not for the last two years allowed myself a single whim, nor any other expense than the housekeeping; however, I have some private urgent ones, for which I must have heaps of assignats.”

Beaumarchais' sister was exposed to the rigor of famine;

* Beaumarchais had settled on his sister Julie a pension of 4000 francs, and, instead of being paid in specie, it was now necessarily paid in assignats.

his wife and daughter were not better off. I see in the correspondence of Madame de Beaumarchais that one of her friends walked about the environs of Paris to try to procure her some bread, which for a few days was scarcer than diamonds. "They say here," he writes from Soizy, Prairial 17, Year 3 (5th June, 1795), "that at Briare one can have flour; if it were so, I would bargain with a safe man in this neighborhood, who would take it to your house by the passage-boat, which goes from Briare to Paris; but all that very much increases the price. You will let me know what you think of it; in the mean while, I do not despair of getting hold of some rolls. Ah! if I had the gift of miracles I would shower on you, not manna from heaven, but some good and very white bread."

On learning, in his exile, all the misery that afflicted his family, Beaumarchais also learned they had strength of mind to support it—that cheerfulness had not quite disappeared from this formerly joyous family; they were exposed to death from hunger, but the frightful axe was no longer employed, and they began to breathe.

"Here," writes one of his old friends to him, "comes the soup tureen of the family; that is to say, you see on the *mahogany* table (for we have now no table-cloth) a small dish of haricots, two potatoes, a small *carafon* of wine, and plenty of water. Your daughter wants a poodle to serve her for a napkin and to clean her plate; notwithstanding that, come, come; if we had not something to eat, we should have something to laugh at. Come, for your wife and child want a miller, since the drawing-room is decorated with a flour-mill; while your Eugénie will charm thine ear with her forte-piano, you will prepare the bread for her breakfast, your wife will knit your stockings, and your future son-in-law will be the baker; for here each person has his trade, and that is the reason our cows are so well kept. It is a funny sight to see our women without wigs in the morning, each fulfilling some *ancillary* occupation; for you must know that each of us has put himself to work, which explains why in our *régime*, if there are no longer any masters, there are still servants. This letter costs you at least 100 francs, including the paper, the pen, the ink, and the lamp oil; finally, for economy, I have written it at your house. We all embrace you, anyhow and through every thing.

While his family and friends courageously supported the dangers and griefs of this sad epoch of our history, Beaumar-

chais, at the same time a commissioner and a proscribed man, continued to struggle in the midst of the difficulties of an act of impossibility. During two years, from June, 1793, to May, 1795, he had at last succeeded by subterfuges in keeping the sixty thousand guns from the rapacity of the English, when a new incident occurred which rendered all his efforts useless. In the middle of the quarrels which succeeded the fall of Robespierre, a fresh discussion took place in the tribune about these unfortunate guns. Lecointre, with his usual heedlessness, denounced Beaumarchais again, and after having already accused him of complicity with the late ministers of Louis XVI., he accuses him now of having robbed the state in the affair of the guns retained at Tervère, and of connivance with the late ministers of the Committee of Public Safety. The ridiculous and intemperate ranting of Lecointre decided the English minister to waive the scruples of legality which had hitherto stopped him; notwithstanding the protestations of the American agent, he carried off the sixty thousand guns by force to Plymouth, declaring also that if these guns were not French property, they should be valued by an arbitrator, and paid for to the person to whom they belonged by right.

This violent solution rendered the situation of Beaumarchais very trying; for, if the English confiscated the guns without paying for them, he was in a position to lose the sum expended by him in obtaining and preserving these arms, and, at the same time, would have to restore to the French government all the sums they had advanced him in assignats upon his deposit of 750,000 livres. However, the English government, in face of the claims of the fictitious proprietor, behind whom was concealed the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," did not think they could go so far as to confiscate them; they made an arbitrary estimation of the arms, and paid a sum far below their value to the person who lent his name to Beaumarchais in June, 1795. From this moment the mission of the latter was finished; he demanded to return to France, to give up his accounts, and to put an end to so strange a position as that of an agent of the government charged with a foreign mission, and, at the same time, inscribed in his own country on the list of *émigrés*, his possessions seized, and all

his income confiscated. But it was more easy to place his name on the fatal list than to get it erased, and Madame de Beaumarchais vainly pursued all the authorities of the day with solicitations:

"A law is made to-day," she wrote to her husband in June, 1795; "four days after it is recalled. Thus they took away from the Committee of Legislation the power of striking off the names of emigrants; they have now given it back. In the interval we have lost our reporter, who has left the Committee of Public Safety in his turn, and set out on a mission. It was necessary to speak to his successor, to instruct him, to rouse him, &c., &c. In virtue of this new decree, we thought that the committees could alone decide our affair. Not at all so; at the Legislative Committee they told us that it was to the Committee of Public Safety that we must at once go, as it was already in possession of the affair. We went there; but when we expected they could positively conclude it, they told us the Convention was taken by surprise; the affair could only be terminated by a decree, and not by a resolution; it was a government affair—quite a special case. So that if my dear Peters, instead of having had a mission, had fled since the 31st of May from fear, we could furnish proofs of it, every thing would be explained, and he might profit by a decree which restores, and puts in possession of their property, those even who have been outlawed. These are contradictions one can hardly support.

"We can assure you our courage will not slacken, and we shall obtain the victory."

While waiting till it pleased the government to put an end to the absurd injustice of which he was the victim, Beaumarchais forgot his personal situation to interest himself in public affairs.* I see him writing from Hamburg numerous Me-

* The city of Hamburg was then the residence of a rather large number of emigrants of distinction. Beaumarchais visited some of them. He saw a great deal of Talleyrand, who was there, after his return from America, waiting, like himself, to be struck off the list. He was particularly intimate with the Abbé Louis, afterward Baron Louis, Minister of Finance under the Restoration, who was then called Joseph Louis. Beaumarchais had got him into a commercial house by lending him money for it. The letters of M. l'Abbé Louis express great gratitude and affection toward Beaumarchais, who, with his usual sagacity, could appreciate the talents of his *protégé*, and foresee his brilliant destiny. During his forced leisure at Hamburg he wrote several things on various subjects, which are but sketches, but which occasionally contain interesting details.

morials, either to various influential persons of the time, or to those in authority, with whose names he was sometimes unacquainted, to transmit opinions upon general questions, which excited his solicitude.

At last the government of the Convention was replaced by that of the Directory and the two Councils. The ardent solicitations of the wife and friends of the proscribed man at last procured the erasure of his name from the list of emigrants, and, after three years' absence, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" was able to return to his country.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Beaumarchais after his Return to France.—His Life under the Directory.—His Death.

HAVING returned to Paris on the 5th of July, 1796, Beaumarchais found himself surrounded by the ruins of a large fortune, destroyed not only by the general crisis, which had destroyed that of so many other persons, but also by the effect of six successive seizures; by the confiscation of his revenues, the carrying off his papers, and the disappearance of every thing but his debts. His beautiful house was defaced, his garden destroyed. At the very time when his debtors were freeing themselves from their debts by paying them in assignats to the treasury, numerous creditors were waiting to seize him. He had accounts to render to and to receive from the state, which, after having sequestered his fortune, still held in their hands the 745,000 francs which he had deposited with them. He occupied himself at first in marrying his only daughter "with a good young man," he says, in a letter already published by Gudin, "who persisted in wishing to marry her when it was thought I possessed nothing; she, her mother, and I, he adds, considered we ought to reward this generous attachment. Five days after my arrival I made him this handsome present."* When the happiness of his daugh-

* The good young man to whom, in 1796, Beaumarchais gave his charming daughter, was M. André-Toussaint Delarue, who was, in 1789,

ter was assured, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" had to regulate his accounts with the government, and to remedy, as he best could, the ravages which four years of lawsuit and proscription had made in his fortune. His position with the state, with regard to those unhappy guns, will not have been forgotten. He had received assignats in advance; he had deposited securities to the amount of the value of these advances; the whole of his income had been confiscated nearly four years; he had been obliged to expend considerable sums to prevent the English possessing themselves of the guns deposited at Terrière; and after having preserved these arms during four years, he found himself constrained to allow them to be carried off by force, and to accept the arbitrary price at which the English government had thought fit to value them.

The question was, then, to fix the balance between the advances he had received in assignats and the sum for the sale of the guns also received by him on the one hand, and, on the other, the property he had deposited as security, his revenues and his claims for debt, unjustly confiscated, the various sums expended by him for the preservation of the arms, by order of the Committee of Public Safety—in a word, whether to make him a debtor or a creditor of the Republic, according to the

aid-de-camp to General Lafayette, administrator of the excise under the Empire, colonel of the 8th legion of the National Guard under the Restoration and under the government of July. In 1840 M. Delarue asked, on account of his age, to retire from his post of colonel; the government, not wishing to separate itself from a man who had rendered honorable service in times of difficulty, obliged him to accept the grade of *Maréchal du Camp* of the National Guard, a post which he occupied till February, 1848, when, at the age of eighty-four, he commanded a brigade. The son-in-law of Beaumarchais, at the time we are writing, is still living, surrounded in his vigorous old age by the affection of all those who have known how to appreciate the noble qualities of his heart and disposition. By his marriage with the only daughter of Beaumarchais, M. Delarue has had two sons, the eldest of whom, after having been successively page to the emperor, orderly officer to King Louis Philippe, and colonel of the 2d regiment of Lancers, is now a general of brigade. The second grandson of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" occupies the post of receiver of finances, and a great-grandchild of Beaumarchais, who, by her wit and grace, does not belie her origin, has married M. Rouelleaux Dugage, formerly prefect under the government of July, now a member of the legislative body.

result of this balance. In general, the government did not like to restore money, and this repugnance, in some degree normal, would be even increased in this case by the result of the whole operation, since the Republic had made advances upon securities, certainly, but they had not received the guns. On the other side, it was not the fault of Beaumarchais if, in the midst of the disorder of the times, after not having given him any assistance in a mission they had forcibly imposed on him, they had very unjustly confiscated all his property, and applied to the benefit of the state the recovery of all his debts. The first examination of this difficult adjustment of accounts between Beaumarchais and the state lasted nearly two years. At last the Pluviose 4, Year 6 (January, 1798), a commission named by the Directory, and composed of the citizens Golbécry, Deladieux, and Senovert, after a report very clearly made out, but very long, which consequently we do not produce, after having carefully balanced the claims of Beaumarchais on the Republic, and those of the Republic on Beaumarchais, declared the state remained a debtor toward the latter to the sum of 997,875 francs, including in that the 745,000 francs' worth of contracts deposited by him as security at the commencement of the undertaking.

The author of "The Marriage of Figaro" claimed a larger sum, but it was a great victory to obtain from a not very scrupulous government so considerable a restitution. This sum would have enabled him to satisfy his most importunate creditors, and obtain a little tranquillity at the end of his life, when, by a fatality which caused the misery of his last days, the Directory thought right to name a new commission, which destroyed the work of the first. Refusing to give an account to Beaumarchais of all the government had taken from him at a time when, without any reasonable motive, they had inscribed his name on the list of emigrants, and of the expenses caused for the preservation of the guns at Tervère, this fresh commission made him pass from the position of a creditor for 997,875 francs to that of a debtor for 500,000 francs. It was in struggling with the authorities against the decision of this last commission that the old age of Beaumarchais was consumed. While, in consequence of this unjust decision, the government

joined his real creditors in tormenting him, the latter did not give him a moment's rest; he found himself a prey to summonses, to seizures of his real and personal estate, to attorneys, tipstiffs, and bailiffs; in a word, to all the horrors of a broken fortune. He occupied a superb palace, which he could neither sell nor let; in the midst of the most urgent want, he could scarcely find sufficient to pay the taxes on the two hundred windows and the four iron gates which decorated this palace. An unpublished letter to the minister of finance, Ramel, written even before the new commission had raised his despair to its climax, will give an idea of his situation:

"Germinal, Year 6, Paris, 30.

"Citizen Minister,—I swear to you my state becomes intolerable. I could have regulated the whole world with all I have written on this detestable affair, which wears out my mind and disgraces my old age. To meet with opposition when I am myself so patient a creditor! Always in grief—always expecting, without ever seeing any thing come! Running, knocking every where, and never being able to terminate any thing. It is the punishment of a slave, of a subject of the old régime, and not the life of a French citizen.

"Permit me to send a truckle-bed to a garret in your hotel. They will then say to you every day, '*He is there.*' You will realize then that a wretched man, for six years thrown out of his rank, and ruined, is excusable for desiring persons should condescend to occupy themselves with his case.

CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

The feeling of his private griefs was always with Beaumarchais associated with general reflections.

In this correspondence of his old age, Beaumarchais does not seem always animated with a very lively interest for republican institutions. However, some intimate letters announced a certain taste for the new régime, when there was not exhibited too much irritation from the tricks and violence of one party toward the other. For example, he was present at a dinner where there was an assemblage of patriots, and gave the account of his impressions in the following letter to one of his friends, dated 24 Germinal, Year 5:

"I had yesterday, my dear Charles, a dinner, the remembrance of which will remain a long time in my memory, from the choice collection of guests that our friend Dumas (General Dumas) had assembled at his brother's house.

"Formerly, when I dined at the houses of any of the great men of the state, I was always shocked at the collection of persons of all characters, whose birth was the sole cause of their admission: fools of quality, simpletons who had places, men proud of their riches, impudent young fellows, coquettes, &c. If it was not the ark of good Noah, it was at least the court of King Pétaut; but yesterday, of the four-and-twenty persons at table, there was not one whose personal merit did not entitle him to the post he occupied. It was, if I may use the word, an excellent *extract* from the French Republic; and I looked silently at each, considering the great merit which individually distinguished them. Here are their names:

"General Moreau, conqueror at Biberach, &c., and who made the superb retreat that every one knows of.

"The Minister of the Interior Bénézech, whom the public voice called to the Directory.

"Boissy d'Anglas, the honor of whose re-election was contested for by forty-two departments, and who has just been again re-elected.

"Petiet, Minister of War, whom all military men honor.

"Lebrun, one of the most talented men of the Council.

"Simeon, a very celebrated lawyer of the Council of Five Hundred.

"Tronçon du Coudray, of the Council of the Elders, one of the most eloquent supporters the unfortunate can have.

"Dumas de Saint-Fulcran, at whose house we dined; one of the most esteemed men of the military profession.

"Lemérer, of the Council of the Elders, one of the supporters of the Constitution against the anarchists.

"General Sauviac, a great warrior, who composed the eulogium on Vauban.

"Pastoret, an eloquent pleader of the bold principles of the Council of Five Hundred.

"The Minister of General Police, Cochon, one of those powerful men who know best how to turn a ministerial difficulty to the advantage of the nation.

"Vaublanc, of the Council of Five Hundred, the defender of the colonies against all usurpers.

"Young Kellermann, who (wounded) brings us twenty-five flags from Bonaparte.

"General Menou, who has acquired immortal glory by refusing to fire on the citizens in Vendémiaire.

"General Dumas, of the Council of the Elders; this name requires no further praise.

"Lehoc, who was charged with our affairs in Sweden.

"Zac-Mathieu, a supporter of the Constitution, as were all his friends of the Council of the Elders.

"Portalis, of the Council of the Elders, whose forcible eloquence has a hundred times overthrown the black enterprises of the enemies of the interior, and from whom is expected, the day after tomorrow, a report against the calumnies and abuses inseparable from the freedom of the press.

"Mathieu, Commissary-general of the army of General Moreau.

"Bandeau, General of Brigade, aid-de-camp of General Moreau.

"Loyel, his second aid-de-camp.

"Ramel, colonel of the grenadiers who form the guard of the Legislative Corps.

"And, for the last and lowest of the guests, myself, the observer, who enjoyed himself in the fullness of his soul.

"The dinner has been instructive, not noisy, very agreeable; indeed, was such as I do not recollect ever to have been at before. If you like your friend to see good company, this was excellent. Good-by.

CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

It was in April, 1797, that Beaumarchais appeared at this dinner, where he calls the guests, rather singularly amalgamated, an *extract* of the Republic. Four months after, the 18th Fructidor, a *coup d'état* proscribed nearly half these guests. "The deputies of the people," says Gudin, "were carried away from their sacred seats, shut up in ambulatory cages like wild beasts, crowded into ships, and transported to Guiana." This republican *coup d'état* naturally cooled the republican zeal of Beaumarchais a good deal. "He acknowledged no longer," added Gudin, "either men or actions; he no longer understood the forms or the means employed in these times, stripped of rules and principles. He invoked Reason, which had so frequently caused him to triumph. Reason was a stranger; she was, if one dared to say it, a sort of emigrant whose name rendered those suspected who called on her."

In the midst of this whirlpool of illegality and fraud, it was necessary that the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who had become deaf, he says somewhere, as a sepulchral urn, harassed by creditors, following up insolvent debtors, and especially his great debtor, the state, which would not pay him, should recommence afresh, at sixty-five, the labors of his whole life. It would seem that a situation so disastrous

would have been sufficient to have entirely upset him. However, it was not so. Under the weight of griefs which besieged him, we see him shaking off all personal considerations, to apply his mind with indefatigable ardor to all questions of public interest, to a thousand things, literary or otherwise—to a thousand incidents which were all new to him. At one time he pointed out with indignation, in the journals of the time, the incredible negligence which allowed the body of Turanne, subject to the Vandalism of terror, to remain forgotten and exposed among the skeletons of animals at the Jardins des Plantes, and procured it the order in council of the Directory, which, five or six months afterward, put an end to the scandal; another time he wrote either to the government or to the deputies, who, like Baudin of Ardennes, represent his ideas of moderation and law, memorials or letters upon all the subjects which form the order of the day. He chatted about literature and the theatre with the amiable Collin d'Harleville, or he pleaded with the minister of the interior for the rights of dramatic authors against the actors, and at the same time he wrote to this minister a very earnest letter of recommendation in favor of an unfortunate actress, Madame Vestris. He also occupied himself with the revival of the “*Mère Coupable*.” He enjoyed with delight his late successes at the theatre.

An imagination as ardent as that of Beaumarchais could not be a stranger to the universal enthusiasm which the young conqueror of Italy then inspired. After having followed General Bonaparte in prose and verse beyond the Alps, when the latter came to Paris in December, 1797, the author of “*The Marriage of Figaro*” addressed his friend, the minister Talleyrand, on the subject, in a letter which contains some very bad verses, but which is rather interesting, as it proves that even at this time there were persons in France who mutilated the great name of Bonaparte, as the “*Moniteur*” had done when printing it after Vendemiaire for the first time.

“24 Frimaire, Year 6.

“Citizen Minister,—When Bonaparte signed the preliminaries of peace, I put into the French journals which crossed the Alps these four bad lines, whose only merit consists in their intention, which he has very nobly taken, and with great readiness :

'Jeune *Bonaparté*, de victoire en victoire
 Tu nous donnes la paix, et nos cœurs sont émus;
 Mais veux-tu conquérir tous les genres de gloire?
 Pense à nos prisonniers d'Olmütz.*

"Now that he laughs at us, and conceals himself as much as he can, I beg you to show him the testimony of my displeasure:

'BOUTADE BY AN OLD MAN WHO IS ANNOYED AT NOT HAVING
 SEEN HIM.

'Comme Français, je cherche une façon nouvelle
 De rendre un juste hommage au grand *Bonaparté*.
 Si j'étais né dans Londres, ah! je voudrais comme elle
 Que le diable l'eût emporté!

"You know that I am the first poet in Paris as you enter by the
 Porte Antoine. BEAUMARCHAIS."

Three months later, General Mathieu Dumas, brother-in-law of the son-in-law of Beaumarchais, having introduced the latter to General Desaix, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" profited by it to write by him direct to General Bonaparte a letter, the rough copy of which I have not been able to find among his papers, but which procured him this unpublished letter, in which may be already recognized under its republican familiarity that imperial conciseness which the ancients named *imperatoria brevisitas*.

"Paris, Germinal 11, Year 6 (March, 1798).

"General Desaix has remitted to me, citizen, your agreeable letter of the 25th Ventôse. I thank you for it: I shall embrace with pleasure any circumstance which may present itself to make the acquaintance of the author of 'La Mère Coupable.'

"I salute you.

BONAPARTE."†

* An allusion to Lafayette which does honor to Beaumarchais' feeling disposition.

† I find, among the papers intrusted to me by Beaumarchais' family, another note from Bonaparte when First Consul, addressed to Madame de Beaumarchais, after the death of her husband, and in answer to a petition. It is in the following terms: "Paris, Vendémiaire, Year 9. Madame, I have received your letter; I will act in your affair with all the interest which the memory of the justly-celebrated man deserves, and which you yourself inspire.—BONAPARTE." We may here rectify one of the numerous incorrect details which are found in the "Memoirs of St. Helena." The author of this work made the glorious captive say "that he had constantly repelled Beaumarchais, in spite of all

All the letters of Beaumarchais' old age are not equally interesting as concerns the sentiment which dictated them. Two of them, above all, caused much scandal when they were published by him in the "Journal de Paris," and the "philosopher" Gudin has not failed to reproduce them religiously: we mean those in which, when censured in reference to the publication of Voltaire's works, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," who until that time had never attacked Christianity in a direct manner, allows himself to do so in a moment of impatience.

Some time before, Beaumarchais, by very seriously and very properly requesting an increase in the number of masses for his wife, his daughter, his sister, and the faithful of his quarter, set the example of that kind of respect which incredulity owes to religion. Therefore this outburst in his old age can only be explained by attributing it to a fit of irritation. Disapproved of as they were by Madame de Beaumarchais, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" would, doubtless, never have written these unfortunate letters if his sister Julie, who was very pious, and had some influence over him, had not died a year before.

In order to leave no unfavorable impression on the reader, we must show the same man who edited these improper letters about the same time addressing the following lines to an old sinner, Morande, which were written *dans l'abandon de l'amitié*, the sincerity of which should not therefore be doubted, and which show that if the religious sentiment in him was not complete, it was not, perhaps, so extinct as in many other celebrated personages of the eighteenth century. Beaumarchais writes:

"I do not like your considering the dissolution of the body in your philosophical reflections as the fate which is exclusively destined for us: this body is not us; it will doubtless perish, but the maker of such a splendid edifice would have made a work unworthy his power

his wit, *from the time of his consulate*, on account of his bad reputation and his great immorality." Besides the fact that the two letters we have just quoted are far from indicating so marked an antipathy, the Emperor would not have said that he had repelled Beaumarchais *from the time of his consulate*, as the latter died before the consulate, on the 18th May, 1799, when General Bonaparte was still in Egypt.

if he reserved nothing of that great faculty which he has allowed to reach to a knowledge of himself. My brother, my friend, my Gudin often converses with me about this uncertain future, and our conclusion is always, Let us at least deserve that it may be good; if it be so, we shall have made an excellent calculation; if we are to be mistaken in such a consoling view, this reflection on ourselves, preparing us for an irreproachable life, has very great comfort."

By the side of this we like to see the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" accused in 1798 by his friend Talleyrand, who was then minister of foreign affairs, of being the dupe of every one, and he bore this reproach very well:

"The day before yesterday," he writes, "I was smiling at the great praise you lavished on me by saying that I should be the dupe of every one. To be duped by all those one has obliged, from the sceptre to the shepherd's crook, is to be a victim and not a dupe. If I could have kept all that ungrateful baseness has taken from me, I would not at such a price have acted otherwise. This is my creed. What I lose affects me but little; that which affects the glory and happiness of my country exhausts all my sensibilities. When we commit a fault, I feel the anger of a child, and without being *good*, or doing *any thing*, I repair every night, in purpose at least, the follies and errors of each day. This is what my friend calls being a dupe, as every one here, they say, thinks only of himself. What an abominable country if this were true of all! but I am sure, and very sure of the contrary. When will you see my little work, 'Commerce de Dupe?'"* It will not displease you; you will find something shown from the past, present, and future—the *future*, all that remains to us! While speaking of the two others, they are already far, far away.

"Hail, imperishable attachment.

BEAUMARCHAIS."

This ardor of sensibility and patriotic disinterestedness must have been very sincere, as Beaumarchais did not fear to display it to so tortuous a man as Talleyrand. He certainly

* It is a Memorial in favor of peace with the United States; our diplomatic relations with this young republic had just been disturbed. Beaumarchais desired to be sent on an embassy to America, and foreseeing that his deafness would be objected to, he refuted the objection beforehand by the following argument, which, if not very solid, is at least very ingenious: "My bad hearing," he wrote, "would not be an obstacle; it is not necessary to speak low to the delegates of a powerful republic when treating of its interests. The mystery used by royal negotiators is beneath our high diplomacy."

could not have intended to make a dupe of him. This was part of his character, which he could well support against the railleries of the subtle minister. And, indeed, nothing was more real than the perpetual solicitude of Beaumarchais for what did not concern him. No one could imagine what a quantity of paper he soiled in his old age, when tormented by personal cares, for the applicants or inventors;* they begged for his assistance, erroneously believing him to be possessed of great influence about all the political, diplomatic, or commercial questions which interested France.

In the midst of these varied preoccupations, and despite the hours of despondency in which Beaumarchais thought himself irretrievably ruined, his natural gayety and quickness of repartee never forsook him, not even in his latter days. When opulent, we have seen that he was a prey to borrowers and beggars, who were often deficient in politeness; his old age and poverty did not exempt him from this kind of unpleasantness: people persisted in thinking him rich. While his house and furniture were being seized by his creditors, he was often obliged to shut his door against the multitude of borrowers who continued to besiege it, and he received strange notes in the following style:

"Fructidor 9 (August 26, 1797).

"Sir,—I can not refrain from expressing my surprise at the impudence in a man of your extraction, leaving a military man of rank at a porter's lodge, and sending him a verbal answer through a servant. You will pretend not to have received this. I expect as much.

"Nevertheless, I never forgot an insult; and I am offended at the manner in which you receive well-bred persons. *Satis.*

"C. DUBOIS DUNILAC,

"Commissary of War, Rue Traversière, Saint Honoré, No. 77."

This, thought old Beaumarchais, is a singular way of begging at doors!

One would hardly imagine how the author of "The Mar-

* Thus one of the last works of his old age is a memorial to the minister of the interior, François de Neufchâteau, in behalf of a man who thought he had discovered the art of directing aerostats. On another occasion, when Madame Scherer, the wife of the minister of war, came to see his garden, Beaumarchais took advantage of the opportunity to present to her a petition, very gallantly worded, in favor of an old soldier.

riage of Figaro" was occupied in his latter days when besieged by *huissiers*. One might guess a thousand times. He edited a Memorial to the Directory on the assassination of the French plenipotentiaries, committed by some Austrian hussars, April 28, 1799, near Rastadt, the news of which had just arrived, and excited a burst of horror and surprise in France. Beaumarchais' Memorial began in the following manner :

BEAUMARCHAIS TO CITIZEN TREILHARD.

"Citizen Director,—In the ordinary course of political events, I consider it would be more than indiscreet on my part to express my opinion, whatever it might be, to you, in the hope of influencing your determination; but the unheard-of crime, the atrocious accident of which the telegraph has just informed us, is of such great importance, that I consider I am fulfilling my duty as a good citizen by telling you in a few words what I think of it."

The author of this Memorial then gives his opinion as to the position France ought to take with regard to the crime; not to be precipitate in taking revenge, but to maintain a calm and imposing majesty. After having developed the motives of his opinion, he continues in these words :

"If I had the honor to be one of the five principal magistrates of the Republic, I should vote for a general mourning on account of the deadly wound received by the nation through its plenipotentiaries at Rastadt. Publish a proclamation identifying France with the execrable insults which her three delegates have received *in her name*. . . .

"Either I am mistaken in my country, or I think that you ought to expect from such a noble mode of acting a *levée en masse* of the nation.

"Salut, respect, and devotion.

CARON BEAUMARCHAIS."

A few days after he had written this Memorial, on the morning of the 18th May, 1799, Beaumarchais, who the previous evening had been very gay with his family and a few friends, was found dead in his bed, having had a violent fit of apoplexy, at the age of sixty-seven years and three months.

It seems that on account of a few words, which were more or less authentic, attributed to the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" in a conversation with a friend who is not named, and the subject of which was the best means of killing one's

self by chemical means without pain, the opinion that he had poisoned himself with opium, found some partisans. Indeed, eight or ten days after his decease, a friend of the family wrote to Madame de Beaumarchais that he had met some one who had *gravely uttered this impertinence*. This report having been revived by several writers in the present day, we must prove that it is altogether without foundation.

First of all, we have before us the certificate of the surgeon Lasalle, who was called in to give a certificate of the death. This certificate is dated the very day of the death, Floréal 29, Year 7, and declares that the Citizen Beaumarchais died "of sanguine apoplexy, and of no other illness." To this testimony we must join that of the son-in-law of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," M. Delarue, who, when informed by us of the persevering manner in which the report was circulated, and of which he was ignorant, wrote to us, some years since, the following letter :

" Villepinte, par Livry (Seine-et-Oise), October 7, 1849.

" Sir,—I have just learned with painful astonishment the rumors which have been circulated about the last moments of Beaumarchais, my father-in-law. The lying assertion as to his suicide, which has been reproduced by serious writers, obliges me to repel, with all the indignation it merits, a fable at which the family and friends of Beaumarchais would have been much hurt if they had known it, if it had been circulated sooner.

" Beaumarchais, after passing with his family a most lively evening, during which his wit had never been more free or more brilliant, was struck with apoplexy. His valet, on coming into his room in the morning, found him in the same position in which he had left him when he put him to bed, with a calm face, and apparently asleep. I was informed of it by the cries of despair uttered by the valet. I hurried to my father-in-law's room, when I ascertained that he had suffered a sudden and tranquil death ; my only subsequent care was to save his daughter, who really worshiped her father, the anguish of hearing news which might have been fatal to her if it had been communicated to her without preparation. This, sir, is the exact truth.

DELARUE."

The narrative of Beaumarchais' death given by Gudin in his manuscript corresponds perfectly with that of M. Delarue. Let us add, in order to do away with all suspicion of planned reticence on the subject between the relations and friends of

the defunct, that in the most private family letters there is no trace of such an opinion; Gudin, for instance, in his letters to Madame de Beaumarchais, makes frequent allusions to the death of his friend, always wishing, like him, "for a sudden and tranquil death;" while Madame de Beaumarchais writes on her side, "He has left this world without knowing it, as he entered it." Whence we must conclude that if Beaumarchais committed suicide, this suicide was only known to strangers, and that the surgeon who wrote the certificate of his death, and his own family, were completely ignorant of it, which is certainly not very probable. We must, moreover, remark that Beaumarchais in his old age presented the appearance of a man "of a full and sanguine habit." These characteristics of his constitution are indicated in the last passport which the minister of France at Hamburg gave him when he was returning to his native land; and he calls himself, in some verses of the same period,

"Un bon vieillard grand, gris, gros, gras."

Now the annoyance, agitation, and impatience caused by the destruction of his fortune, which have been brought forward to explain his asserted suicide, when we take them in connection with his temperament, point much more naturally to apoplexy. Finally, this opinion as to his suicide, founded altogether upon heedless words which an *anonymous* witness heard Beaumarchais utter when speaking of poisons which give no pain—this opinion as to his suicide is radically incompatible with the situation and known disposition of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro." He adored his only daughter, and was adored by her; he alone appeared capable, and thought himself capable, of extricating his great fortune from the chaos into which it had been thrown. Is it admissible that he could have thought of a voluntary leaving of this heavy burden on the shoulders of his daughter and her young husband, who was then quite inexperienced in the affairs of the world?"

It is also known that one of the distinctive points in Beaumarchais' character was his obstinate perseverance; he was combating, as we have said, at the time of his death, the un-

just decision of a final commission, which proposed to the minister of finance to take from him 997,000 francs, granted by a preceding commission, and to make him a debtor to the state for the sum of 500,000 francs. *Ten days* before dying, Floréal 18, Year 7, he wrote on this subject to the minister Talleyrand, his friend, the following lines: "It is against this murderous commission, *which I shall deal with apart*, it is against their unjust manner of acting toward me, that I now appear before the minister of finance; I at once place my just claims before him in a light as clear as the sun, and this is the time for you to speak in my favor." Was this a time, it being established that at his death the minister of finance had not yet come to any determination—was this a time, when a violent and decisive struggle was pending, for Beaumarchais to think of giving up the contest by committing suicide? Evidently not. It is certain, then, that this story of his suicide, already disproved by the most authentic documents and personal testimony, is not less at variance with all probability; it rests, then, upon no foundation, and ought to be forever dismissed.

In one of the darkest walks of his garden, Beaumarchais had arranged a group of trees, which were destined to shade his tomb. "There," says Gudin, "his son-in-law, his relations, his friends, and some men of letters who loved him, performed the last duties toward him, and Collin d'Harleville pronounced a speech, which I had composed on the first outburst of my grief, but which I was not in a fit state to deliver." Beneath this funereal clump, after so stormy a life, Beaumarchais doubtless hoped to be able to say at last, "*Tandem quiesco*." This was again an illusion; this clump is now a street, and the coffin which it protected has had to be removed to one of those great cemeteries, which will also one day become streets and public places.

On the death of the author of "The Marriage of Figaro," his brilliant fortune seemed completely destroyed. He left to his heirs plenty of debts and lawsuits. However, after a few years, through fortunate circumstances and good administration, the state of his affairs became notably improved. I find, indeed, in a report of the cashier Gudin's, addressed to the

daughter of his old patron, that his fortune, although considerably diminished, amounted in 1809 to nearly a million. Madame Delarue, then, was somewhat exaggerating the meaning of words when, in a dialogue which we have given above, she said to the Emperor, "Sire, the Revolution has ruined us, or nearly so." As the opinion that Beaumarchais was completely ruined has been expressed in a good many works, we have thought it right to correct it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

It is evident—and this is a fact which can neither be suppressed nor contested—it is evident that, among the celebrated men of the eighteenth century, the author of "The Marriage of Figaro" is one of those who have not enjoyed a consideration equal to their celebrity. His character was often the object of attacks and calumnies of the most injurious nature. He seeks to explain the fact himself in an unpublished document; we will let him speak for himself:

"With gayety, and even *bonhommie*, I have had enemies without number, and have nevertheless never crossed, or even taken the path of another person. By dint of reasoning with myself I have discovered the cause of so much hostility; in fact, it is natural enough.

"From the period of my thoughtless youth I have played every instrument, but I belonged to no body of musicians; the professors of the art detested me.

"I have invented some good machines; but I did not belong to the body of engineers, and they spoke ill of me.

"I composed verses, songs; but who would recognize me as a poet? I was the son of a watchmaker.

"Not caring about the game of *loto*, I wrote some pieces for the stage; but people said, 'What is he interfering with? he is not an author, for he has immense speculations, and enterprises without number.'

"Unable to meet with any one who would undertake my defense, I printed long Memorials in order to gain actions which had been brought against me, and which may be called atrocious; but people said, 'You see very well that these are not like those our advocates

produce; will such a man be allowed to prove without us that he is in the right?" *Inde iræ.*

"I have treated with ministers on the subject of great points of reform of which our finances were in need; but people said, 'What is he interfering in? this man is not a financier.'

"Struggling against all the powers, I have raised the art of printing in France by my superb editions of Voltaire—the enterprise having been regarded as beyond the capabilities of one individual; but I was not a printer, and they said the devil about me. I had constructed, at the same time, the first establishments of three or four paper factories without being a manufacturer; I had the manufacturers and dealers for my adversaries.

"I have traded in the four quarters of the globe; but I was not a regular merchant. I had forty ships at sea at one time; but I was not a shipowner, and I was calumniated in all our sea-ports.

"A ship of war of fifty-two guns belonging to me had the honor of fighting in line with those of his majesty at the taking of Grenada. Notwithstanding the pride of the navy, they gave the cross to the captain of my vessel, and military rewards to my other officers, and what I, who was looked upon as an intruder, gained, was the loss of my flotilla which this vessel was convoying.

"And nevertheless, of all Frenchmen, whoever they may be, I am the one who has done the most for the liberty of America, the beggetter of our own; for I was the only person who dared to form the plan and commence its execution, in spite of England, Spain, and even France; but I did not belong to the class of negotiators, and I was a stranger in the bureaux of the ministers. *Inde iræ.*

"Weary of seeing our uniform habitations, and our gardens without poetry, I built a house which is spoken of; but I did not belong to the arts. *Inde iræ.*

"What was I, then? I was nothing but myself, and myself I have remained, free in the midst of fetters, calm in the greatest of dangers, making head against all storms, directing speculations with one hand and war with the other; as lazy as an ass, and always working; the object of a thousand calumnies, but happy in my home, having never belonged to any coterie, either literary, or political, or mystical; having never paid court to any one, and yet repelled by all."

APPENDIX.

LETTER OF W. CARMICHAEL.

“Philadelphia, September 3.

“Dear Sir,—I have forgotten my French so much since my arrival here, although I have not forgotten my French friends, that I do not dare to write to you in that language.

“I have written twice lately to you about your affairs, so that I have the pleasure of repeating to you that the Congress begins to feel its want of attention toward you, and with what easy credulity it has received the base and malicious insinuations of the others, which I really think would never have had any weight if Ducoudray had not at first spread notions altogether to your prejudice. I can not tell you whether this unhappy nation will be in a position at present to satisfy your just demands, but I am sure it will adopt some plan for arranging this affair, so that it may find the means of paying at a future period what its present inability alone prevents it from liquidating now; and upon this understanding the Congress, as I hope and think, will express publicly to you its sentiments of gratitude for your generous conduct.

“I have endeavored with all my might to convince my compatriots of the injustice and ingratitude with which you were treated before the arrival of M. Deane, and I flatter myself I have had some success; he has made similar efforts, so that justice, although slow, will resume its sway. I wish, for the honor of my compatriots, that we never had any occasion to make such representations to them.

“M. de Francy is in Virginia, and is acting in your behalf sincerely and indefatigably; I expect him soon in this town. Your nephew has passed some weeks with me, but he is ordered, with his general, to join the army under the orders of General Sullivan. He is a brave young man, and, on acquaintance, is much liked; he has all the vivacity of his age, and is anxious to distinguish himself. General Conway assured me that he behaved like a little hero at the battle of Brandywine. I take the liberty of entering into these details because I know they will please his mamma, for bravery was always a powerful recommendation with the fair sex, and she must be charmed to find so much of it in her son.

"Our arrangements for foreign affairs are not yet terminated ; accordingly, I do not know whether I shall be continued in my present place of secretary of embassy at your court, being at three thousand miles distance from it, or whether I shall be employed in some fresh department.

"Dr. Franklin will certainly be continued at the court of Versailles, and a blow will also very certainly be dealt so as to make the Lees fall back quietly into the obscurity from which they were endeavoring to raise themselves ; but whether that be effected or not is not yet quite certain ; we have so many intrigues and cabals here, that you and our friends suffer from them on the other continent ; why should we not have them, considering that we are sovereign states, and that we are friends and allies of Louis XVI. ?

"Our government machine being only such as it was invented, we have some points of perfection to join to it, and some wheels to add before it can go on smoothly and with success, as we should wish. In the mean while we are going forward slowly, and sometimes we roll over the stones roughly enough, God knows.

"I beg you to believe me forever yours,

"W. CARMICHAEL."

THE END.

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